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[HUSBAND AND WIFE—ONCE MORE IN HIS POWER!]

A FEARFUL SECRET.

CHAPTER IX.

If ever a man was disappointed at the very moment he deemed his success certain, if ever a cruel and cowardly action brought about a prompt punishment, both came to pass when John Drew paid his visit to the Place.

He would far rather Janeta had not driven him to hostilities; but still he believed he held the game in his own hands. However much she disliked him she was his wife, and Mrs. Carlyle could not defend her in forsaking her husband.

Indeed, Mr. Drew saw himself, in imagination, very comfortably provided for the rest of his natural life, since he had good reason to believe his aunt loved Janeta too well to risk her suffering poverty or privation; and as what was a wife's became her husband's (it was before the Married Woman's Property Act), he began to think he had really not done so very badly in the matrimonial market after all.

Never did anyone receive a greater surprise than the news which met Mr. Drew.

Janeta Leigh had flown, preferring to be a fugitive from friends and home than run the risk of having his society forced on his. And Mrs. Carlyle, so far from condemning her as a rebellious wife, declared that she was no wife at all; that she was as free and unfettered as though that wedding in the grim old city church had never been.

Not only had John Drew failed miserably to creep into favour through his wife, but his betrayal of her secret had really been the greatest boon he could have bestowed on Janeta.

The poor child would never have spoken of her troubles, and so might have gone on to her dying day believing herself Mrs. Drew; but Mrs. Carlyle and Lord Drew knew the truth, and would lose no time in finding their favourite, and telling her of her mistake.

John Drew could have gnashed his teeth as he returned to Mrs. Biden's cottage. He felt that all was over. No chance remained to him of propitiating Mrs. Carlyle; while, as for his cousin, he knew perfectly well that Jack would never speak to him again.

The unknown girl he had once pitied himself for having married would soon be in very truth, Lady Drew, and mistress of Alandyke.

"Dear! dear!" said Mrs. Biden, kindly, when her nephew returned to her hospitable roof. "Is there anything the matter, John? You look as if you've had a shock!"

"I have!" returned the prodigal, with the low, persuasive voice so few women could resist. "Do you ever read the newspapers, Aunt Susan?"

"Why, yes!" replied Mrs. Biden, rather puzzled. "They have the *Times* regular at the Rectory on the second day; and they generally send it on to me when they've finished it. Were you wanting to see it, John? I'd send across and ask for it if you like?"

John shook his head.

"I don't want to see it. I only meant if you read the newspapers you would soon know of my troubles. The great Barraouda bank has stopped payment, and I've lost every farthing I had in the world!"

Mrs. Biden threw up her hands.

"My poor boy! And I thought your little

properly was tied up so that you couldn't touch it by speculations!"

Jack shook his head.

"It was all in that detested bank! Aunt Susan, I stand before you a ruined man—I, who came down to Yorkshire so light-hearted, hoping that at last fortune was smiling on me, and I might venture to ask you for my dearest Laura!"

A wiser woman, or one less trusting by nature, would never have been deceived by such a transparent falsehood; but Mrs. Biden swallowed the story readily. She even listened attentively while John told her of a friend in America who had offered him a first-rate appointment. He only wished now he had accepted it; but the thought of Laura had kept him in England. Now, perhaps, it was too late.

However, gently pressed by his aunt, he declared his friend had promised to keep the post open for him till the middle of March. If he sailed by the next steamer he would be there in time; and it was such a healthy climate. It could not injure dear Laura's health.

Three months hence he should have made a home worthy of her, if her mother would spare her to live the other side of the Atlantic.

Some people would call the widow a fool; some would say she deserved no pity; but, for my part, I never can feel harsh towards those who are led into folly by their unbounded trust in their fellow-creatures. Still, there is no doubt every relation the Bidens possessed would have been indignant in their scorn could they have seen the widow not only give her blessing to Laura and John on their engagement, but actually advanced the reprobate a loan of fifty pounds (her half-year's income had come in not a month before, poor creature!) and she trusted him with more than a third of the sum that must support her family till July, to be repaid as soon as he received his first month's salary.

"Eight hundred a year is such a comfortable income!" said the ne'er-do-well, cheerfully. "I am sure Laura and I can do well on it, and you may be sure of my sending the fifty pounds back by the first mail after I touch a cheque, Aunt Susan. Your money will be as safe as though you put it in the bank!"

And she believed him! Not a misgiving troubled her when she saw him depart with so large a portion of her worldly store.

In spite of her poverty, her trials, and her many children, Susan Biden had a large, trustful heart.

Even those of the "girls" who had given up the world were a little pleasantly excited by Laura's engagement. Only those who have known what it is to live for years in a family of women can understand the charm of having at least a man belonging to them.

The young ladies drew bright pictures of visits to Laura in her far-off western home, where, doubtless, one or two more of them would glide gracefully into matrimony, while one or two reflected how nice it would be to speak of "my sister the Honourable Mrs. Drew," and thought, with quite a glow of cheerfulness, that if John's cousin persisted in his distaste for married life some day Laura might be Lady Drew, so that John left quite a glow of excitement among the sisters.

Laura speedily became the most important person in the house.

A cup of strong tea and a plateful of hot toast were brought to her as consolation when her lover had departed. There was a regular chorus of entreaties to her "not to fret," and "to bear up," while Mrs. Biden and her first-born had very serious consultation as to whether it would not be a becoming mark of attention to put on their best things and go up, to carry the great news, to Aunt Janeta. But the bride elect herself decided the question.

"I won't have her told," she said, with rather unnecessary irritation. "She always was hard on John, and since she took up with that Miss Leigh she's been worse than ever.

I don't believe Aunt Janeta cares a straw for anyone but her and my Lord Drew."

"I like Jack," said the mother, quietly; "and you know, Laura, he can't help being rich and a nobleman!"

But Laura had no toleration now for the man who stood between John Drew and fortune.

She was already settling in her own mind that it was a cruel act of injustice John should have been the son of the younger instead of the elder brother.

But Mrs. Biden was far too loyal to the head of the family to keep such an important fact as her daughter's engagement secret; so, two days later, when a telegram had been received from John, saying he sailed that afternoon from Liverpool, the mother told Laura frankly she meant to go up to the Place, and the young lady, reflecting, perhaps, it would be a pleasant thing to be congratulated, agreed to accompany her.

They started directly after dinner, thinking, perhaps, on their cold black walk of the cheerful fire in Mrs. Carlyle's drawing-room, and the fragrant tea and rich pound-cake, which were dispensed so regularly at four o'clock.

They talked briskly, however, of those never-ending themes, John and America, as the distance seemed shorter than usual; when at last they passed through the lodge-gates, and walked up to the grand entrance of the Place.

"Aunt Janeta must be out!" said Miss Laura, when she saw the door closed, and heard no joyous barking of Mrs. Carlyle's little spaniel. "What a nuisance! I think she is always driving now!"

They knocked and rang—an unusual thing at the Place, for usually the porter was on the spot to receive visitors and answer inquiries; but this did not excite them at all, and when the butler appeared his information was quite a surprise to them.

"My mistress is in London, madam," he said, quietly. "She went up on Friday with Lord Drew."

Friday! It was the very day of John's proposal and departure. Could he possibly have travelled with his aunt? She asked whether Mrs. Carlyle went by the two o'clock train.

"No, madam, by the night rail," said the old servant, who knew the intense curiosity with which her relations all regarded Mrs. Carlyle's movements. "It was quite an unexpected journey. None of the family came to see her off. I asked the mistress if I should send word to the Rectory, but she only said she had better write from London, as the length of her stay was quite uncertain."

Mrs. Biden and Laura looked amazed.

"It was only last September that she came back from London. She was not ill, I hope?"

"My mistress seemed perfectly well," was Hill's rejoinder. "The journey was entirely Lord Drew's suggestion, I believe."

"And has Miss Leigh gone too?"

But the butler had received private instructions what to say in reply to this question; besides, Janeta was the darling of every servant at the Place.

Not to please every one of the possible heirs and heiresses would the household have said a word against their young lady.

"Miss Leigh is away on a little holiday, madam. It is possible she may return before Mrs. Carlyle, but my wife will take good care of her."

He did not add that in his pocket was a sealed letter addressed to Janeta, which his mistress had given him with her own hands, saying,—

"You will remember, Hill, never leave this out of your or your wife's keeping. If Miss Leigh return, welcome her as though she were my own daughter, and give her this." The old man understood perfectly his lady did not know where her favourite was, and was setting forth to find her, but he was not going to take the Bidens into his confidence.

They stood there half-knockout, when a pony-carriage came dashing up. It contained the Rev. Augustus and two sons.

"Hey day, Hill!" began the clergyman, without a word of ordinary greeting. "What's the meaning of this? I spoke at lunch of coming up to see your mistress, and Mr. Ainslie told me it was no use, for she was in London. Of course I said he was mistaken, but he stuck to it, and so here I am to know the rights of it!"

Hill repeated his story. The Rector looked incredulous.

"Gone to London without telling us! Without saying good-bye to us! I can't believe such a thing!"

Hill looked profoundly indifferent as to whether the Rev. Augustus believed it or not. Evidently he thought his part of the conversation was over, and held the door in his hand as though anxious to close it. Seeing this, and feeling it rather beneath his dignity to cross-question a servant, Mr. Augustus turned to withdraw, firing off as a last parting shot,—

"I suppose my sister is at the Langham as usual?"

"Mrs. Carlyle said all letters were to be sent to her bankers, as she might be travelling about."

Utterly dumfounded by this reply the brother and sister walked slowly down the terrace steps, Laura following, and Hill shutting the door as though he felt the honours of the interview were his.

"What can it mean?" asked the clergyman. "I know Geoffrey's widow is eccentric. I may say extremely so, but I should never have dreamed of her taking such a step as this. She has actually disappeared like a fugitive. Fancy the mistress of Hillington Place being wandering about no one knows where!"

"The bankers know," suggested Mrs. Biden, who never having needed bankers on her own account looked on them as beings far above the ordinary run of mortals, "at least, Hill implied as much."

"The bankers!" exclaimed the Rev. Augustus, in a reproachful tone. "Much good that would do her if she were ill or in affliction of any kind."

"But Janeta is never ill."

"That's not saying she never will be. But I can see through it all. It's enough to make poor Geoffrey turn in his grave! I declare it makes me shiver to think of such a thing."

"But Geoffrey knew she was fond of travelling about," said Mrs. Biden, whose slow imagination had not caught her brother's meaning, "and you see she's not a young girl. She can take care of herself."

Mr. Augustus wrung his hands.

"Do you actually defend her in it? You, a widow like herself? Susan, I am ashamed of you!"

"You shan't talk to mother like that!" struck in Laura, who, in common with her sisters, would never allow anyone else to speak a word against Mrs. Biden, though the whole seven criticised her behaviour themselves. "You've never even said what you suspect Aunt Janeta of doing, and yet you expect us to join with you in blaming her!"

If looks were blows it would have fared badly with the young lady. The Rev. Augustus was fairly in a rage—and clerical rages are rather more objectionable than those of the laity, since the efforts due to their profession to keep it in seems to make the explosion more terrible when it comes. The Rector was shaking with anger as he replied,—

"I thought I was talking to a sensible woman, not an idiot! Susan, do you mean you can't see what has caused Janeta's extraordinary flight? She has been miserably infatuated with that young man for years—she means to marry him. She has just sufficient decency left to be ashamed to apply to me to perform the ceremony, so she has gone off to be married privately in London."

"I don't believe it," said Susan, promptly, for simple as she was, she yet could judge a woman's feelings far better than her brother.

"To begin with, she couldn't marry Lord Drew. She is his aunt!"

"She is nothing of the kind. She only styles herself his aunt to make the attachment go unnoticed. Really, she's his second or third cousin. That's all."

"I am quite sure she never means to marry him," returned Mrs. Biden; "but if she did I don't see how it would affect any of us."

The Rector started. That view of the case had never occurred to him. Thinking it over he saw Susan was right. If Mrs. Carlyle lived to be ninety, and to bury five husbands, it would make no difference to his brother's will. That precious document secured the rights of his family to his estates; and however many times his widow changed her name would not interfere with the ultimate fate of Hillington Place.

"It is never well for a woman to make herself ridiculous," he said pompously, not choosing to admit his mistake, "and it would be a most unsuitable match!"

"It will never be a match. Why, do you know, Augustus, she told me once, in speaking of Jack (I always call him that. I can't get into the way of saying Lord Drew), she said she should like him to marry someone a great deal younger than herself."

"Then it's a pity she doesn't think of her niece," said the Rector, cruelly. "You've seven girls going begging, my dear, and there are a good many others in the family. We could afford the young fellow a choice!"

It is impossible to describe the air of triumph with which the little woman drew herself up.

"You are quite mistaken, brother. My girls were never going begging. They have been brought up far too well to be always on the look-out for husbands; besides, one of them is already appropriated. In a few months dear Laura will be leaving us for an American home. It is a sacrifice, of course, to lose her, but I will never let it be said I stood in the way of my children's interests, whatever it costs me."

Surprise number two for the Rector. He had looked on "Susan's girls" as one and all old maids, since the only passably good-looking one had chosen to waste her affection on worthless young Drew.

At first he thought it an idle boast, but the mother's triumph and the daughter's blushes seemed to tell him that for a second time that afternoon he had made a mistake, and he fell to wondering whether his niece had been advertising in one of the matrimonial journals for a husband, since he had no remembrance of any American visiting Hillington, and Laura had not been away from it for many months.

He made his congratulations rather stiffly, and as though he disliked the task.

It is a very strange thing, but most people do seem to grudge their poor relations any piece of good fortune, and the Bidens were emphatically poor relations, and had little chance of ever becoming anything else. Mr. Augustus put a good deal of condescension into his tone as he said,—

"Of course, I am glad to hear of your being freed from the tax of maintaining one of your children, but I hope you have been cautious. I have no wish to speak against Americans. They may be most charming people, and make excellent husbands (his tone insinuated 'but they may not'), still it seems a great risk to me to entrust a girl to a man she has never seen."

Mrs. Biden gasped.

"Goodness gracious, Augustus! I'd never do such a thing, and I should deserve any blame I got if I did. Not one of my girls shall ever marry any man I don't know and appreciate; but this dear fellow has grown up from a lad amongst us, and I, for one, always loved him. I don't deny I'd rather Laura had married and settled down in England, but John's no prospect here, and there's a fine opening for him out West, and I think I can trust my own sister's son to make Laura a good husband."

Mr. Augustus looked on the ground.

"Is it possible you are speaking of John Drew?"

"Of whom else? It is an old attachment, but the dear boy was too honourable to speak out until he had saved enough to make a comfortable home for my sweet Laura, and to —"

But she was interrupted.

"Has he saved enough now?" demanded her brother grimly. "If he has I'll be the first to praise his conduct; and, though I'm not a rich man, I'll write Laura a cheque for three figures when it comes to buying the trousseau."

"He had saved it," said Mrs. Biden, gratefully, "and he put his little hoard with his fortune, which you know was invested in the Baracunda Bank. It was his anguish at reading of the bank failure aroused my anxiety. I questioned him, and he told me all, asking if he accepted the post in America whether I would let Laura come out to him!"

By this time they were at the Rectory gates, and according to all precedents should have parted, but the Rector (he had a heart, despite his gruffness) declared his wife would be delighted with a visit from Laura. She was to say he had sent her to stay to tea, and was walking home himself with her mother.

"And Laura," said the Rector, in an unusually gentle voice, "don't tell your fine news to your aunt. She's had a bad headache all day, and if she gets excited she'll be awake all night."

But when he was left alone with his sister his manner changed. It was peculiar with Uncle Augustus that when he was not sure of his ground he blustered and stormed; but when he knew himself to be in the right, and felt, so to say, master of the situation, all his bumptiousness vanished, and he became a quiet, almost gentle, spoken man.

His own wife always declared his heart was very tender, and perhaps she understood why his presence was a comfort to the sick and sorrowing, but his sister had never but once before—at her husband's death—heard his voice sound as it sounded now.

"I want to talk to you seriously, Susan!"

Her heart sunk within her.

"I hope you are not going to speak against John! You were always hard on him, Augustus; and you know he could not help the breaking of the bank!"

"Susan, do you remember I was one of the trustees to his little fortune? It could not be invested in the Baracunda bank, because it now stands in my name and that of his mother's lawyer in the funds!"

Mrs. Biden felt perplexed.

"Then he is not ruined, after all? Perhaps he wanted to try dear Laura's affections, and make sure she was marrying him for himself alone!"

"He is ruined so far as the fortune left by his mother goes. He has sold his life-interest in it for a mere song to a Jew money-lender. To my knowledge he will never touch a penny of the interest again. Why should he have told you that story about the bank?"

"Perhaps his 'savings' were in it."

"My dear Susan, there is no such bank. If you don't believe me, ask some lawyer. I assure you I am telling you the simple truth. John Drew's attachment to Laura may be genuine enough; but, if so, why should he announce it with such a string of falsehoods?"

"He may have thought I should object to him as a son-in-law if I knew the truth; and then this appointment in America is so good!"

"What part of America—Canada?"

"I don't know."

"The United States?"

"I have no idea. He only said America."

"And what was he to do? Was it an office, or a surveyorship, or what?"

"I don't know."

An angry speech rose to her brother's lips, but he kept it back. He had very nearly told

Susan that simpletons like her encourage swindlers by their credulity.

"What was his friend's name?"

She shook her head.

"Augustus, don't look at me like that! I always loved John; and I believed what he told me. I know Laura loved him, and I was glad for my child to be happy. Even now you have no proof his story of the American appointment is untrue."

"Why should one thing be true when all else is false?" asked the Rector. "Besides, the whole thing is so vague. What newly-engaged young man would leave his fiancée without telling her where to write to him?"

Mrs. Biden brightened up.

"He promised to send the address from London."

"And has he done so?"

"No; but we had a telegram this morning saying he sailed to-day, and would post a letter from Liverpool."

"Do you know the name of the ship?"

"The Amazon."

"That's better!" said Mr. Carlyle, more cheerfully. "Only give me something to go on, and I'll sift the matter for you. I shall ride to Whitby at once, and telegraph to Liverpool for a list of the Amazon's passengers. I shall have it before we go to bed. I suppose, if Drew's name is not in it, you'll believe I'm right?"

Mrs. Biden hesitated.

"I am very fond of John!"

"So was Janeta. Now she has a great many faults, Susan; but I don't think her fickle. For a rich woman she's wonderfully constant. At one time she treated young Drew almost as her own son. Now, don't tell me she'd have changed so without a strong reason."

"Then she should have told us what it was," said Mrs. Biden, glad, like many a weak nature, to find someone she could safely blame.

"I don't know," said Augustus, slowly. "Janeta is very proud of the family honour. If John had done anything shameful, I fancy she would hush it up at any cost, just because he was of her husband's kin."

Mrs. Biden was shaking in every limb. A weak woman by nature, and an affectionate one, her heart and her vanity had alike been gratified by her daughter's engagement.

She would not, could not, believe her brother's judgment was right; and yet a terrible fear that it might be so assailed her.

Only to think if the engagement fell through! What would Laura not have to suffer at the hands of her six sisters! And what privations the whole family would have to endure if John Drew indeed failed to return the fifty pounds she had lent him!

"There is one thing puzzles me," said Augustus, slowly. "Supposing my helpful nephew has gone to America, how did he get the money for his passage? I'll never believe he had such a sum in his pocket ready for an emergency! Of course, he may have borrowed it of his cousin; but, as Lord Drew was at the Place, and he dared not show his face there, I can't make it out!"

"I lent it him!" confessed the widow.

"You!"

"My dividends were paid last month, and —"

The clergyman put one hand not unkindly on her arm.

"My dear Susan, I begin to think he must really have had the appointment offered him! I have very little faith in John Drew; but I can't believe he would stoop to rob his mother's only sister!"

Mrs. Biden was crying quietly.

"We shall soon know now," she answered;

"for I suppose even you will be convinced if my boy's name is in the list of the Amazon's passengers!"

He did not assent. It was in his mind John Drew might be very glad to get to America at his aunt's expense, and yet have no prospect of a situation there, and no idea of marrying Laura; but he felt it would be

almost heartless to tell his sister so. He only pressed her hand affectionately, and promised to return to her as soon as he got back from Whitby with the list.

"You had better send the girls to bed. I can make one or two errands in the village, which will keep me till nearly ten; and Susan, don't let Laura have even a hint of all this, poor girl. Let her rest in her fool's paradise—at any rate until we are certain we are right."

It was all very well for him to issue his commands; but for years Mrs. Biden had been a passive slave to her daughter's stronger wills. The girls had been her at once with questions.

What had Aunt Janeta said? Where was Laura, and what had she and Uncle Augustus been pacing up and down the lane for instead of coming into the warm fire? Was he very angry at Laura's engagement? They did believe she had been crying.

With a desperate effort Mrs. Biden shirked the question about the *Ulla-d-Ulla* with her brother. The rest she managed to answer satisfactorily, enlarging on Mrs. Carlyle's sudden journey, and on the Rector's liberal promise concerning Laura's trousseau.

"Your Aunt Janeta promised me she'd settle a little money on each of you on your wedding-day, so you see Laura won't go to her husband quite empty-handed; not that John would mind," she added, with the nervous agitation of a person more anxious to convince herself even than her listener. "It was easy to see it was Laura he was in love with, not money."

"He has been a long time finding it out," said the eldest Miss Biden, a little spitefully. "There, mother, do be cheerful. There's nothing to cry about."

Laura came home at nine, and very soon after the family separated for the night. They had never kept late hours. When economy is a necessity, to burn fuel and candles needlessly seems folly.

By half-past nine Mrs. Biden found herself alone, waiting for her brother. It was a moonlight night, and she could see him turn the latch of the gate, and watch his tall figure come slowly up the little garden path; but there was nothing in his walk to tell what news he brought. And when she opened the door, and eagerly questioned him he would not answer, but led her kindly back to the little parlour and shut the door.

"Can you bear it, Susan?"

Susan shivered. Remember, her child's happiness was at stake; and, besides, she had loved John Drew almost as a son. Then, too, his being false meant her losing fifty pounds.

"Only tell me the whole truth, Augustus. Don't keep anything back. Let me know all."

"You shall read the message for yourself. After all I did not send for a list of the passengers. I just telegraphed the question, 'Did Mr. John Drew sail in the *Amazon* this afternoon?' Wire answer 'yes' or 'no!'"

"Read it for yourself, and, Susan, bear it as well as you can. I am afraid it will be a grievous blow to you!"

"Mr. and Mrs. John Drew are in our list of the *Amazon*'s passengers. Ship sailed at four p.m. to-day."

"You see," said Augustus Carlyle, "the people are prudent. They can vouch for the passage being taken, but they won't commit themselves by saying these persons actually sailed in the *Amazon*. Passengers sometimes only go on board just before the ship sails."

Mrs. Biden looked at him with troubled eyes.

"Mr. and Mrs. John Drew! What does it mean? Surely he never thought I would let Laura go out with him at a moment's notice?"

The clergyman shook his head.

"I shall go to Liverpool to-morrow and make inquiries; but, to my mind, it is clear already. He was married privately, no doubt to some unworthy person. This, of course, was the cause of Janeta's anger. He wanted to

get to America with his wife, but had no money. Most likely he had tried every other means of raising it before he appealed to you, and by a plausible story extorted the loan from you."

"He didn't extort it at all. He was most unwilling to take it. I had quite to press it upon him."

The little clock on the chimney-piece chimed eleven, and the clergyman rose to go. It was hastily agreed that nothing should be said to Laura until after his return from Liverpool; though both he and Mrs. Biden felt pretty sure that even if John Drew had really been offered a good appointment in America, which would enable him to refund the fifty pounds, the Rector would never be called on to write the cheque he had promised for Laura's trousseau.

CHAPTER X.

It seemed to Janeta Leigh that no human creature had ever felt so desolate as herself when she left the friendly shelter of the confectioner's shop, and went out into the cold piercing frost of the short February day.

For the third time in her life—the third time, too, in less than six months—she had taken her fate into her hands. It had been little pain to her to leave Normanton, where her unloved childhood and youth had been spent.

It had cost her nothing, when she understood him as he was, to quit John Drew's protection; but to part herself from Mrs. Carlyle was a bitter grief.

She had been happier at Hillington Place than she had ever hoped to be. She loved her mother's friend with almost a daughter's fondness.

Life at the Place had been very sweet to her, especially after Lord Drew had joined the party. There had been no thought of harm in Janeta's heart. He was good and true. He was brave and noble. She loved him; but she never for one moment forgot the barrier between them.

She was his cousin's wife. She could never be aught to Lord Drew but a friend; still it seemed to Nettie that Jack's friendship was worth more than another's passionate devotion.

She would have been well content never to be nearer to him than she was in those happy winter days could she only have felt certain she should never be less near.

The awakening had been sudden and cruel. One look in his eyes told her he cared for her. One stray remark of Mrs. Carlyle respecting his possible marriage taught her her own secret. It did not need her husband's cruel sneer and bitter taunt for poor Janeta to understand that intensely as she had always regretted her marriage it had done her more harm than she had ever dreamed of, since it cut her off from all happy ties of heart and home.

After that discovery, even without her husband's interference, Hillington Place could no longer have been a perfect Paradise to Nettie, but she was forced to leave it—to leave it almost before daybreak—without one single farewell, one single word of kindness.

The advertisement she had seen in the local paper was far different from what the confectioner's wife fancied. Among the "Wanted" was an appeal for a young woman of quiet habits and some education to go to London with an invalid lady and little girl.

By some strange chance, in the pocket of her dress Janeta had found a letter written by her a few days before, at Mrs. Carlyle's request, in recommendation of a young servant who was leaving the Place. At the eleventh hour the girl discovered she had tired of her wish for change, and would gladly stay on at so good a home. The character thus had never been needed, and by some chance Janeta had slid it into her pocket, and thought no more of it till she read the advertisement.

We have mentioned Janeta read it two or three times, and decided she was certainly a young woman of quiet habits and some character. Domestic service was hardly the role she would have chosen, but—oh! cruel necessity!—she must live, and all other mode of employment seemed closed to her. In attendance on an invalid she would be equally hidden from her husband and Mrs. Carlyle. Her past would be a closed book. She could, as it were, begin life afresh.

She only wanted to be quiet—to drift, as it were, into some peaceful spot until the end came. She was so tired of life, so weary of its fitful fever, surely she would not live much longer. She was fond of little children, and had rather a talent for sick nursing, so the post advertised required nothing beyond her skill. Besides, she fancied her care of the invalid lady would at least save her from much intercourse with her fellow-servants.

It was a large cheerful house at which Janeta knocked; and the page who opened the door showed her at once into a neat little sitting-room, saying Mrs. Hamilton would soon be there.

Left alone, our heroine felt her heart sink. She was so unused to acting she feared to betray herself at every step.

She was not long kept waiting. A delicate-looking—almost girlish lady soon came in, leading by the hand a little girl of five. Her deep mourning and close widow's cap made her seem even younger by the contrast—she looked barely twenty. Really she was five years older, and the little girl was her only child.

She told "Jane Thornton" at once she feared she had misunderstood the nature of the situation.

"I am sure you are a gentlewoman, and there might be things to do you would object to. I am far from rich, and I cannot afford a nurse for my little girl. It is really a useful maid I want, though I own, if I were seeking a companion, I should be tempted to engage you."

But Miss Thornton quietly persisted. She was, she admitted, of gentle birth, but she was obliged to earn her living. She had had a little experience of teaching, and would prefer any other mode of gaining money. There was nothing she would object to undertake, even—here her face flushed—to have her meals with the servants if needful.

"It would not be needful," said Mrs. Hamilton, quickly. "I am obliged to travel about a great deal for my health, so that I have no house of my own. When we are in apartments you could take your meals with me. During our visits to my relations they would be served for you and Violet upstairs; but I can offer you only eighteen pounds a year, and I know it is very little for such services as you would be willing to render."

The letter of reference was produced, and deemed quite sufficient. Mrs. Hamilton was leaving Scarborough in two or three days. When could "Miss Thornton," that was to be Janeta's style, join her?

Nettie, who had a vague fear of remaining in the place to which she might be traced, said she was obliged to go to York, but she would meet any train Mrs. Hamilton named, and accompany her to London.

The bargain was struck, but a telegram received while they were talking made Mrs. Hamilton change her plans. A favourite brother was returning from America, and his ship would be at Liverpool the next day. Nothing would satisfy the devoted sister but to start that very afternoon. This suited Janeta admirably.

She packed for her new mistress with devoted zeal, stole an hour to make a few useful purchases for herself, and was so busy she never recollected the bag she had left at the confectioner's until she and her new employer were fairly on their way.

They did not travel without stopping, on account of Mrs. Hamilton's delicacy; but when they reached the hotel at Liverpool,

where she had telegraphed for rooms, a surprise awaited them. The ship was in, but it had not brought Mr. Gascoigne. At the last moment he had been prevented sailing, and, in a letter sent by a friend's hand, promised his sister to be with her by the next steamer—in a week at latest. Mrs. Hamilton bore the disappointment very well. After all, it was but a pleasure deferred. The hotel was very comfortable, and it was no hardship to have to spend a week there with Miss Thornton and her little girl.

"Miss Thornton" quite agreed in the praises of the hotel. She was very much taken with the pretty fragile looking widow, and the fairy-like child. If such a load of sorrow had not been ever present at her heart Janeta would not have been unhappy in her new surroundings.

Mrs. Hamilton's ailment prevented her walking beyond from one room to another, so Miss Thornton and Violet took their excursions alone. They saw most of the best streets in Liverpool, and never wearied of looking at the magnificent docks, and watching the ships that rode so peacefully at anchor.

It was their favourite walk. The sea had a great fascination for them both, and Janeta had by this time quite lost all fear of recognition. Besides, no place on earth seemed so safe a hiding-place as this bustling seaport. Both John Drew and his cousin hated noise and crowd, while Mrs. Carlyle had a special objection to Lancashire.

"I wish you would go down to the office this morning," said Mrs. Hamilton, when it was nearly time to expect her brother's ship, "and ask them if the *Danube* can possibly be in to-morrow? I don't think you will mind, for the people there are wonderfully civil and obliging."

"I will go with pleasure," replied Janeta. "The head clerk is a dear old man. With such a splendid white head he looks quite patriarchal."

"You had better not take Violet," said Mrs. Hamilton, quietly. "I feel so lonely this morning, I should like to have her with me; and, Miss Thornton, please be as quick as you can. I can't explain it to you, but I have a strange presentiment I am going to be ill."

"I hope not," said Nettie, kindly. "It would make Captain Gascoigne's home-coming so sad if you were not well enough to go and meet him."

She set off at a brisk pace, for she knew Mrs. Hamilton was really too weak and nervous to be left long alone. She reached the office, and received the good news that the *Danube* would certainly be in the next day, when passing quickly out into the street she found herself face to face with—her husband!

She was no coward, but anxiety and grief had told on her health. Remembering all she had suffered at this man's hands an unspeakable fear seized on her. She could not make her escape. She tried to hurry away, but her feet remained still—motionless. She tried to hail a cab, but her trembling fingers would not obey her wish, and John Drew, noticing this, laid one hand heavily on her shoulder, saying with a cruel laugh,—

"I don't think you'll escape me this time, young lady. You've led me a pretty dance, but I think I have you safely now!"

His mocking words, the jeering taunt, were all too much for her. With one bitter cry the girl sprang forward, and tried to elude his grasp. Then her senses seemed to leave her, her head swam, and suddenly she tottered and would have fallen to the ground had not John Drew caught her just in time.

She lay there like a marble statue, perfectly senseless and motionless in his arms. Her worst fear was realized now. She was utterly at his mercy.

(To be continued.)

The readiest and surest way to get rid of censure is to correct ourselves.

ROY'S INHERITANCE.

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CHAPTER XXIX.—(continued.)

Mrs. WILTSHIRE, the cook, was the only one of the servants who did not regard her with mistrust; but as these meetings with her were very rare, her friendliness did not do Nora much good.

One day she was just going out, after having read half the *Times* to the Viscount, when Grimper, looking much excited, hurried after her.

"Stop a bit, please, miss," she said, roughly, "I want to know where the ten-pound note is I left on the hall-table only a minute ago?"

"Why do you ask?" looking gravely surprised. "Of course, I know nothing about it."

"That's all very well; but I must have it," with a menacing look in her cold, grey eyes. "His lordship gave it me for the house bills, and I only turned my back on it for a minute because I thought I heard him calling."

"Well, don't excite yourself!" annoyed by the woman's manner. "You know that no beggars or tramps ever come to Mountfalcon, so that it must be safe."

"It wasn't a tramp as walked off with a thousand pounds from his lordship's chest upstairs," looking insolently into the girl's sweet face.

"When was that—I never heard of it?" eagerly.

"No; you never heard of it, and you don't know where it went," with an unmistakable sneer.

"Do you mean to insinuate that I do?" her eyes flashing fire, her small frame quivering from head to foot; but her voice low and very distinct.

"Yes," turning round and facing her, with a horrid gleam in her eyes. "We never missed money before you came into the house!"

"Grimper!" with a gasp, as if she could scarcely credit her ears. Then she drew herself up proudly, and said in a voice she could not keep quite steady, "Come and say that before your master."

Without waiting for an answer she walked straight through the music-room, only stopping as she went to point contemptuously to the bank-note, which was lying on a small table near the door.

Grimper caught it up, and, muttering something under her breath, had the grace to look ashamed of herself; but Nora never stopped till she stood in front of Lord Mountfalcon with flushed cheeks and heaving chest.

Venables, who was clearing out the drawer of a cabinet, shut it up quietly, and took up his position behind the Viscount's chair, as if ready to take part in any discussion that was going forward.

"I am sorry to trouble you, Lord Mountfalcon," she began, in her fresh, young voice, which was tremulous with indignation, "but this woman has dared to insult me. For the first time, I've heard to-day that you've been robbed of a thousand pounds, and she says I know all about it!"

"And so she did, my lord!" broke in Grimper, with an angry flush on her face. "I met her, myself, with Mr. Philip's pocket-book in her hand, and she can't deny it!"

Nora started, and the colour faded from her face, as she remembered her promise. Was she to go through the remainder of her life with the stain of a theft on her name?

"Be silent, Grimper," said the Viscount, sternly. "Supposing the thousand pounds were in that pocket-book, you cannot prove that Miss Macdonald put them there?"

"How does Grimper know it?" began Nora, quickly. "I never saw it before, and I certainly didn't open it!"

"What took you into the park that morning?" asked the old man, slowly.

"I could not rest in bed," a soft pink stealing into her cheeks, "for thinking of the fire,

and I went out simply to meet Grimper and ask the news."

"She went by me like a flash of lightning," with a contemptuous snort, but Lord Mountfalcon held up his thin hand to stop her.

"That was the first time" (to Nora); "the second time you went for another purpose?"

"Yes; but I mustn't tell you," clasping her hands.

"I know that you saw my son. I guess that he sent you back for his pocket-book; and all I wish to know now is whether you expected to find him in the park when you went out?" said the Viscount, impressively.

"No, I never expected to see him again in all my life. Don't you remember how you sent him away?" and she shuddered.

"I remember, but he won't," his grey head drooping and his eyes half closed.

"Listen to me, Lord Mountfalcon," coming a step forward in her fear lest he should fall asleep before he had done her justice. "Not content with saying that about the thousand pounds, she accused me of stealing a paltry ten-pound note this afternoon—accused me—a Macdonald," throwing back her head proudly, "and said no money was safe in the house since I came!"

"Grimper, your insolence is insupportable," said the old man, rousing himself.

"How many times am I to tell you that this young lady is my guest, and to be treated with the greatest respect? Apologise in the humblest way you can, or leave my service before you are an hour older!"

"Is this what I've deserved," cried Grimper, throwing up her arms dramatically, "after thirty years of slaving and keeping watch day and night like a dog? I'm to be turned out to starve, whilst an interloping miss turns the place topsy-turvy, and plays into the hands of the biggest scoundrel that ever stepped!"

"No," said Nora, coldly, her beautiful face calm with something like despair. "You have behaved strangely to me, but I believe you are faithful to your master. Stay with him, and I will go away. I will leave Mountfalcon to-night."

Then the Viscount rose from his chair and drew up his gaunt frame, whilst his faded cheeks flushed.

"You will not leave Mountfalcon, Miss Macdonald!" with an oath. "I'd part with them all first—yes, the whole infernal lot—from beginning to end. You bring the only bit of brightness to an old man's withered life; and so long as you will honour me by your presence, with a low bow, 'I feel as if I had something to live for. Leave the room, Grimper,' his tone changing to one of intense severity. 'I am utterly disgusted with your conduct.'"

"Very well, my lord; and when you are murdered in your bed, and your last penny stolen, you will know what Grimper was worth," her chest heaving, her voice breaking hysterically. "But I'll never come back—no, not if you was to go down on your bended knees I wouldn't," and she rushed out of the room."

"Venables, see that the woman's wages are paid," said the Viscount, briefly, as he sank back into his chair.

Nora was too generous not to feel pity for a fallen adversary; and now that her indignation was cooling she remembered Grimper's devotion to her master and to that other master, who never came to his old home, and she could not bear that she should be sent away on her account. As the valet left the room she was screwing up her courage to intercede for her, when Lord Mountfalcon beckoned her to him.

"Come here, child!" he said, huskily. "A great wrong has been done you in my house, and I wish to make what small amends I can. Take this key," pulling one out of his waistcoat pocket, "and open the third drawer in that cabinet. You will find some jewels there which I wish you to have."

"No, no, please not. It's very kind of you,"

she said, earnestly, "but I would not have them for the world."

"But you must, it is my wish! I always repair a wrong."

"But don't you know that they all would say I had got them out of you? Mr. Falconer would think it, for one."

"I thought he was your most particular friend?" drawing his brows together.

"My friend? No!" with a shudder. "I never liked him!"

"You did not like his being turned out?" looking at her, sharply.

"No; and I don't like Grimper going."

"Not when she thought you had been robbing me behind my back?"

"She can't have thought it. She was out of temper, and said the first mad thing that came into her head. Let her stay!" coaxingly.

He looked at her as if he were drinking in the beauty of the appealing eyes and the smiling lips, and yet as if his thoughts had strayed far away. Then he turned, and rested his head upon his hand.

"If that boy Roy had been what I thought him!" he muttered. "But there's no good in talking about it. A spendthrift, a gambler. He would make havoc of it all. I won't keep you, my dear! I should like to be alone."

Nora went away; but Grimper did not go that day or the day after.

CHAPTER XXX.

FEELING very low, and particularly miserable, Nora sat down on the ivied stump, and gave herself up to the luxury of being wretched.

As to the object of her voluntary martyrdom, she felt more despondent than ever.

When she first undertook her painful task, she had few doubts about its success. She thought that she was almost sure to succeed, if she were very good and very patient; and, as soon as Mountfalcon was hers, she had nothing to do but to hand it over to Captain Falconer as lightly and as easily as she would give a pencil-case or a bon-bon to a friend.

She forgot that Lord Mountfalcon must die before she could come into possession of the estate; and she never remembered that there was such a quality as pride, which might prevent any man of independent character from accepting such an enormous present from the hands of a mere girl.

During her long, lonely sojourn in the Hall she had had plenty of time for reflection, and gradually all the difficulties in her path dawned upon her perturbed mind, and she felt half-distracted by her fears.

Look which ever way she might, there was no ray of light; and all the unpleasantness of her life seemed to have culminated in Grimper's unheard-of insolence that very afternoon.

If everyone distrusted her, she might be accused of one crime after another, and she had no one to take her part except an old man whose faculties were failing.

It might have been better to have taken Captain Falconer's advice, and to have gone home; but that would have been giving up her one great hope, and only the most desperate calamities could drive her to do that. Still, she confessed herself to be the most lonely, friendless, miserable girl that ever lived, and the tears filled her large eyes, and made them too dim to discover the beauty and the glory of that lovely summer's day.

The sun came in long, slanting golden shafts through the twinkling mass of greenery overhead; wild flowers bloomed wherever space was left them by the tall, feathery fronds of the ferns; and birds twittered joyously to each other, as if there were no such things as sin and sorrow in the world.

"Found at last!" cried a pleasant voice, and the next moment a young man, in an irreproachable suit of dittoe, stood before

her, the sunlight on his fair young head, his brown pot-hat in his hand.

Nora put up her hand to dash away her tears; but it was caught, imprisoned, and kissed most rapturously on its way.

"Aren't you glad to see me?" as he sat down, unasked, by her side. "I've come over in a most awful state of mind, but I hope you've missed me," looking straight into her eyes, and watching with delight the sunset that was spreading over her sweet face.

"I thought, perhaps, you would not venture here again?" demurely.

"I'd venture through anything to get to you!"

"I mean you were rather cool last time?" turning away her head.

"I couldn't be," with an air of outraged innocence. "I never am, and you always affect me just the other way. Look at me! I've been so awfully seedy—laid up for weeks."

She ventured a timid glance.

"You don't look very bad. What has been the matter with you?"

"Oh, the fire," flushing slightly. "They talked fearful rot about it in the paper. I didn't do anything to boast of, but I knocked up afterwards."

"I saw about Lord Clavering, Captain Falconer, and a Mr. Sinclair. Ah! now I know," her face lighting up, as she clapped her hands. "I've found out who you are, and I'm so glad!"

"Fred Sinclair, at your service," with a laughing bow.

"And I know how plucky you were! You were the very first to go and try to save the poor Duke!" her eyes glowing.

"The whole honour and glory belong to Roy Falconer," he said, carelessly. "But most adorable princess, I want you to do me a great favour," leaning forward earnestly. "I've brought a dog cart on purpose. Do come for a drive with me—a few miles out and back again! I've got a paragraph in a paper I want to ask you about—but I daren't show it you here."

"Then I'm afraid I shan't see it," shaking her head.

"But where's the harm? I promise you that the horse won't bolt," his eyes speaking a volume of entreaty. "It's such risky work talking to you here. The last time I came I ran up against Mr. Falconer, and had to carry him off to the Castle, pretending that the Duchess had sent me for him."

"Then he did go to the Castle that night?" eagerly, as she remembered his fierce denial.

"Yes, and carried on tremendously. I thought he was mad or drunk. By-the-by, did you ever see this before?" fumbling in his pocket, and pulling out a small gold pencil-case in the shape of a pistol.

Nora remembered it at once.

"Yes, it's Mr. Falconer's. Where did you find it?"

"In a room they never use—just under Honiton's," he said, gravely, as he put the pencil-case back in his pocket.

"How very odd!"

"Very odd indeed," drily. "But now for our drive," starting up. "Only half-an-hour, punctual to the moment. Come!"

"No, Mr. Sinclair, I'm bound in honour not to leave this place," shaking her golden head.

"I only ask you to come a drive just outside the walls. It would be so delicious to think you trusted yourself to me, if only for half-an-hour!" entreatingly.

Nora forgot that, if he were Mr. Sinclair, he must be a friend of the Duchess of Yorkshire's, therefore she was not the least on her guard; but, in spite of his most earnest entreaties, she resolutely refused to leave Mountfalcon.

At last he saw it was useless to press her, and with an aggrieved air sat down again. Presently he pulled out the *Work*, and pointed to a paragraph which was marked out in pencil, and watched her face closely as she read it. It ran thus:—

"We understand that a marriage has been arranged between Miss Nora Macdonald, only daughter of the late Sir Edward Macdonald, Bart., and the Hon. Philip Falconer, second son of Viscount Mountfalcon, of Mountfalcon."

The colour rushed into her cheeks, her eyes flashed fire.

"Oh, what a wicked, shameful lie!" she exclaimed, breathlessly. "Who could have put it in?"

"Easy to guess," said Fred, quietly; "but it is a lie? You are quite sure?" looking full into her eyes.

"As sure as that my name is Macdonald."

"Oh! but it won't be for long!"

"What do you mean?" with the gravity of a judge.

"You might change it, you know. Sinclair's quite respectable," with a side glance up into her indignant face.

"I'm not sure," laughing. "You came here anonymously."

"All is fair in love and war."

"But we are not at war."

"I should cut my throat if I were."

"Mr. Sinclair, will you do something for me?" very earnestly, as she changed the subject promptly.

"Anything in the world."

"Will you tell Lady Clavering that there's not a word of truth in it—and—and—everybody!"

"I'll do more. I'll put it in the paper that it is an impudent fabrication! Still better, may I say that it would have been quite true if they had put Sinclair instead?" lowering his voice to the tenderest whisper, and trying to take possession of her hands.

Nora started from her seat, blushing furiously.

"What do you think I'm made of to talk to me like that? Oh, it's cruel—cruel—just because I'm alone!"

Fred was aghast, and most profuse in his apologies. He protested that it was the romance of the thing that had got into his head, and he begged for forgiveness so humbly that at last she was obliged to accord it.

"But you will marry that horrid fellow, I'm sure," he went on, dolefully, "if there's no one to look after you. How can you, a poor little desolate thing, hold out against a man who would stop at nothing? He's capable of carrying you off if he can't manage it in any other way."

"He couldn't make me his wife unless I chose."

"He could," with a little nod, as if he were thinking over it deeply. "He nearly murdered his own father; he tried to burn poor old Honiton alive!"

"Stop, you mustn't say such awful things."

"But they are true—true as death—and he'll marry you and break your dear little heart. See if he doesn't!"

"You shouldn't try to frighten me," making a poor attempt at a smile. "I've got a few friends outside these walls—I'm not quite alone."

"Yes, outside you've a host, but he's inside or can be if he chooses, and there you haven't one. It makes my blood run cold to think you might be murdered, and no one knew it!"

She shivered.

"And who would miss me if I were?"

"I should; but you wouldn't care a straw about that. You are not going? I haven't told you half the news. Miss Prinsep's going to marry the parson—Vernon I think, is the name—and the other one is to make a match with a fellow named Singleton. Lady Clavering says they were both their partners at her Christmas dance, and she wonders if any other match will come of it!"

Nora was deeply interested, and had so many questions to ask, and Fred took such pleasure in answering them, that she could not tear herself away. At last she pulled out her watch and gave a little cry. The next minute she was flying through the ferns as fast as her active little feet could take her,

and Fred had no time for the sentimental farewell he had planned. He fancied himself desperately in love, and he was ready to do anything on earth to save the "fair princess" from Philip Falconer. The difficulties in his path made him all the more anxious to succeed, and he found a most eager ally in the Duchess.

Roy was lying on the sofa in Lady Claverling's boudoir, when the Duchess of Yorkshice came into the room, looking very handsome in a cream-coloured Gainsborough hat.

"Have you heard the news?" she asked, excitedly.

"Anything special?" with the smallest amount of interest.

"Only that little sneak has been and gone and done it," with vicious emphasis.

The colour rushed into his face.

"Done what?"

"Engaged herself to your uncle!"

"Who dares say so?" raising himself on his elbow, his eyes stern, but very eager.

"All the papers. Read it for yourself," handing him the *World*. "It must be true. Now what do you think of that?"

"My uncle is no fool," calmly, though the fiercest anger was in his heart.

"I don't believe a word of it," cried the Countess, standing up as usual for her little friend.

"My dear, a fact is a fact. Philip Falconer meant this from the first, and the girl has only played into his hands. If she had not been in such a hurry what a splendid match she might have made to be sure!"

"A Falconer is good enough for her, I hope," a touch of haughtiness in his tone.

"Especially this particular Falconer!" with a mischievous light in her eyes. "You could recommend him as a perfect paragon!"

"I shouldn't recommend him at all," shortly.

"No one can ever bring anything home to him," said the Duchess, meditatively. "It must be a comfort to a wife to know that her husband always scrapes through without being hanged."

"He shall never be Nora's husband!" said Lady Claverling, stoutly. "Oh, if I were only a man!" with a look at the handsome Hussar, who had been sent back to his sofa after venturing to ride for the first time since his illness.

"What would you do, Lady Claverling?" tugging wrathfully at his golden moustaches.

"I'd marry her myself," she said promptly. He took no notice of this remark, except to draw his brows together in a frown. The Duchess looked at him thoughtfully, and the old anger against Nora stirred in her breast.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," she said, after a pause. "I'll send this *World* on to Lord Mountfalcon, and then I'd bet anything that Miss Nora Macdonald's turned out before she knows where she is. Philip Falconer will soon give her the slip when he finds out that she isn't an heiress."

"No, no! that would never do."

"For Heaven's sake do nothing of the kind!" said Roy, very earnestly. "I'd never look any of you in the face again if the poor child were ruined by one of my friends."

"But Roy, if she ruins you?"

"I have to thank my own folly for that. But, honestly, I should torture myself into fits if I thought you were going to do anything of the kind," standing up and looking straight into her eyes, with a strong appeal in his own.

"Very well," she said, with a sigh. "But if anything happens to the girl in that grim, old house, the consequences be on your obstinate head!"

Then, saying she must be back to give Honiton tea, she hurried away.

"Do you know, Roy," said Lady Claverling, in an awe-struck voice, "I'm getting quite into a panic about that child?"

"What do you want me to do? Give up the Hussar, and go in for a detective?"

"Not that quite!" with a smile. "But don't you think you could reconnoitre?"

"I might; but where's the good?"

"I've such a feeling something will happen to-night. My maid saw your uncle arrive by the train."

"Jove! I never thought he would show his face again," and there was a long pause for anxious thought.

Lord Mountfalcon was very strange that evening as dinner, and talked so oddly that Nora was quite alarmed.

Venables ventured to remonstrate when told to bring another bottle of whisky, and brought on his head such a storm of indignation that Nora expected him to give warning on the spot; but the imperturbable valet only shrugged his shoulders, and filled his master's glass when he had fetched the whisky, as if nothing had happened.

But when dinner was over he respectfully advised Miss Macdonald to sit in the library, whilst he led the Viscount back to his own rooms.

Nora was only too glad to take the hint, and sitting down to the piano, solaced her disturbed mind with Chopin.

She was entirely engrossed in trying to master a difficult passage, when she was nearly startled out of her wits by feeling a hand laid on her shoulder, whilst a husky voice said, close to her,—

"My beauty, you've deserted me!"

She sprang up from the music stool so suddenly that the Viscount (for it was he) fell back upon the floor with a tremendous crash. In a perfect agony of fear she screamed for Venables, who came at once.

"Oh! tell me, is he dead?" she asked, with a sob.

"Not a bit of it," said the valet quietly, as he bent over his master. "I'm sure I'm very sorry that this has occurred; but I was out of the way for the minute, and I thought he was safe not to stir."

"He must be very ill to fall like that!" looking at the long, lean, form with infinite compassion. "He startled me by coming behind me. I jumped up, and down he went!"

Venables seemed almost inclined to smile, which shocked her desperately. He went to the bell, and rang it three times.

Grimper answered it, and between them they got the old man out of the room. She avoided Nora's eyes, and kept her own fixed on the floor.

For the second time Nora was left alone, with her nerves all unstrung.

CHAPTER XXXI.

It is very unpleasant to be alone in an ill-lighted room when your nerves have just been upset by a startling incident.

The library at Mountfalcon was naturally very dark; the walls lined with book-shelves, the furniture of the heavy, old-fashioned type that was supposed to be suitable for an apartment devoted to study.

It could look very cosy when a bright fire was in the unusually capacious grate, with the light playing on any bit of bright gilding that it caught on its way. But on a warm evening, when there was no fire, the small amount of illumination given by the two candles at the piano only made the darkness seem more mysterious and shadowy.

Nora pushed the window to, and thought that she fastened it; but the bolt did not catch, and the slightest puff of wind made it give a small creak, which sounded as if someone were pushing it open.

Again and again she was startled by it, but she told herself not to be foolish, and tried to engross her attention with a novel of ancient date.

Gradually she grew absorbed in it, and forgot her own anxieties in those of the heroine. She was not likely to be disturbed by a visit from one of the servants, as Grimper never troubled herself to come in after once having done what was needful. Earlier in

the evening she had shut all the shutters—except those of one window, which had been left open, to be closed when Miss Macdonald retired to her bedroom.

It was now past ten, and Nora made a practice of never sitting up late in any of the downstairs rooms: for she knew by experience that it was rather nervous work to go across the large hall when she thought everyone else was in bed, for the old, rusty, and dusty suits of armour were apt to rustle or jingle with every breath of air; and the rats behind the wainscoting made noises which sounded just like human footsteps. She turned over the pages rapidly to see if she were getting to the end of a chapter, when suddenly she became convinced that she was no longer alone in the room!

It required an immense effort to look over her shoulder, for every hair was standing on end, and a creepy chill ran down her back.

Slowly she turned her head, and saw Philip Falconer—white, haggard, evidently come in by the window, one half of which was wide open; and his coat was dusty as if he had walked from a long distance.

Enraged at the remembrance of the false report he had published in the papers, Nora sprang from her chair, and confronted him with blazing eyes, whilst her book fell unheeded on the carpet.

"You've no business to come here!" she said, defiantly. "I wonder that you dare to look me in the face after the atrocious lies you've told about me!"

"You shouldn't have such a charming one if you don't want to be looked at," he answered with a forced smile. "Come, child; shake hands. You and I are bound to be the best of friends."

She put her hands behind her back, as if to secure them from his touch, and drew up her neck proudly.

"My friends are always gentlemen!" she said, with emphasis.

"How shocking! Not a single lady amongst them?"

"You know what I mean!" gravely, without the ghost of a smile.

"Hanged if I do! Girls are always beyond me. Don't worry me," throwing down his hat, and passing his thin hand over his forehead. "I am in no mood for any such nonsense. Come, sit down, and have a chat," pointing to the sofa.

"Thank you, I'd rather stand."

"I've a story to tell you that you must hear, and it flatters me to see you standing there like a statue."

She sat down without a word; but at a little distance.

"There were two brothers," he began, shading his eyes even from the dim light of the two candles: "One was a good-looking boy with nothing in him; the other had more mind perhaps than heart."

"What was the use of a heart to him, when no one cared a jot whether he lived or died? All the love and the thought were for the eldest one, the younger was thrust out into the cold. Was it his fault that he grew up bitter, sour, and vindictive, a second Ishmael, his hand against every one, because every hand was against him?"

"At Eton, the one was a favourite—great at cricket, and foot-ball; the other made no friends, but won the prizes by hard work. They couldn't take them from him when he got home, but they grudged him every word of praise, whilst Victor was made a fool of, and lauded to the skies."

"Even at his death the son was pushed aside for the grandson, and his home was made too hot to hold him. If he grew wild and went the pace the fault is on his father's head, for he was bound to go to the dogs"—clenching his fist, whilst the veins on his forehead filled and stood out like large cords—"bound to go, unless an angel dropped from heaven to save him."

"Alone he stood in the world, as if he had been born an orphan; the very money that was

due to him was grudged him from the first, and it was even hard for him to make a decent figure in society. You can imagine what it was to him when a lovely girl about whom men were raving first seemed to care for him. It was like a glimpse of sunshine on a winter's night. She was the only one; and my own nephew came and stole her from me!"

Nora started.

"Good heavens! I was mad; if I could have killed him I would, for a dead certainty; but I had to grin and bear it. I came here; my father scoffed at me, and only made use of me because he had no one else. He would not pay a single debt, whilst he was hoarding up his gold—what for? He could not take it away with him when he went!"

"I am sorry for you," she said gently. "I know what it is to feel lonely and desolate, for I've been an orphan for such a long—long time."

"If you are sorry," raising his face, and looking at her eagerly, "now's the time to prove it. I, the only son, am an outcast; you the stranger are about to become the adopted daughter. I haven't a penny, I'm utterly ruined; you will have so many thousands you won't know what to do with them. Will you promise me one thing—that when the old man has definitively accepted you as his daughter, you will be my wife?"

Nora stood up, her bosom heaving—her eyes flashing. "You should have asked me that before you put that lie in the papers."

"It was not a lie; if it wasn't true then I knew it would be true, when I had had time to come and see you," rising slowly, as if weary to death, from the sofa.

"You would have to answer a few questions first," resolved to show him how much she knew, before she flung her disdainful refusal in his face. "Can you tell me what became of the thousand pounds missing from Lord Mountfalcon's room upstairs?"

"Can you tell me who dropped the little gold pencil case in the shape of a pistol, in the room underneath the Duke of Horizon's on the night of the fire?"

Philip's face grew deathly pale, and he bent his head as if he found it impossible to meet the gaze of those beautiful, scornful eyes. But his stubborn will asserted itself and he forced himself to look up, though he could not steady his voice for the answer.

"The thousand pounds belonged to me," he said, coldly. "But what you mean to insinuate about the pencil case Heaven only knows."

"Yes, Heaven does know," she answered, gravely, "and a few people on earth as well."

"I remember you got it into your head once before that I was at the Castle that night," with an attempt at a sneer. "What is the good of my telling you anything if you don't believe me?"

"You were there, you behaved so oddly that somebody thought you either mad or drunk," she said quickly, the colour deepening in her cheeks and giving a brighter beauty to her face, which had been rather pale before.

Philip started, came close up to her and seized her by the wrist. "You wretched girl, you've broken your promise, you've gone outside the walls, you shall be turned out as sure as you stand there!"

"Let me go, I've broken no promise!"

"Then in the devil's name how did you hear this trumped-up tale?" looking fiercely into her eyes, as he held his breath for the answer, which might mean life or death to his guilty soul.

"If there was no harm in the visit, why did you try to deceive me?" she said, boldly.

"Take care, child!" breathing hard in his excitement. "I'm not a safe man to play with. Tell me directly who told you this—this infamous lie?" stammering in his eagerness, though he was well accustomed to deceit.

"I shall never tell you," bravely, though she knew that she was alone with an unscrupulous man; and that the walls of Mountfalcon were thick, so that she might scream

herself hoarse before anyone could come to her rescue. "But you ought to be grateful to me, I've never breathed a word about the pencil case to any one."

He drew a deep breath of relief, though he said with an affectation of carelessness, "I wonder you didn't run helter skelter to my father. The lie would have been nuts to him. Roy's been here!" suddenly, with a suspicious glance as the thought darted through his mind. "He would be sure to make capital out of a report like that."

"He would be the last man to do it, and you know it," with a look of intense disgust. "Besides, he never comes to this house. Good-night, I am going to bed."

A sudden change, swift as lightning, passed over his face, as he placed himself between the girl's slight figure and the door. "Don't let us quarrel any more," he said, entreatingly. "I'm the most miserable fellow on earth, and you haven't a grain of pity for me."

"Yes I have, and if I had any money, I'd give it you to pay your debts," her tender heart softening at once, when he appealed to her compassion.

"Do you think money is the only thing I care for?" looking down into her sweet face in a way that made her cheeks suddenly grow crimson. "Nora, I brought you here, I've been your friend—your steadfast friend through everything, I've given you the chance of gaining thousands: is it too much to ask for something in return?"

"If I ever come into those thousands, I would willingly give some of them to you; only you know they will rightfully belong to someone else. But trust Captain Falconer's generosity. He would give away his head if he could."

"I'd as soon trust to the devil!" fiercely. "But, Nora," his voice sinking to the tenderest key, whilst he forced a smile to his lips, "I will turn over a new leaf, upon my honour I will—I will be the best husband that ever was. My only wish shall be to make you the happiest girl on earth!"

"Be a good husband if you can to any woman who will consent to have you."

"I'll have nobody but you," catching hold of both her hands. "Nora, listen to me!" his voice shaking with intense eagerness, for he was like a drowning man catching at a straw. "If you only had a conception of what would follow, you wouldn't say 'no.'"

"I'd say it a thousand times!" throwing back her head defiantly. "But nothing on earth could give me the courage to say 'yes.' Let me go this moment or I'll alarm the house!"

"Hush! don't be frightened, darling. Just give me your word, and the love will come a little later. You've got such a kind little heart; you would like to think you were making a wretched man happy, and saving a desperate man from ruin!" looking down with eager eyes, as if he saw a vision of wealth and all the good things of life, and rest from debt and continual dunning, instead of her innocent young face.

"Yes, in any way but that," with a shudder of actual loathing.

"Nonsense! I'm your only friend, and I love you with all my heart and soul!" bending over her till she felt his breath upon her forehead, and struggled like a wild thing to free her hands.

"It's false—you only love your father's gold!" she said, breathlessly. "And I wouldn't marry you if it were to save my life!"

"Do you think you can brave me—a poor little, lonely wail, without a friend in the world? You are in my power, child; and as sure as there's a Heaven above us, I'll never let you escape! You shall be my wife, whether you wish it or no—and this very moment I assert my rights."

With a sudden movement he loosed one of her hands, and throwing his arm round her, drew her close to his panting chest.

His will was strong as iron. He was a man

of average muscular power; and, in order to humble her pride, he was bent upon kissing those sweet, pure lips which he knew that Roy's had touched in the days so long ago.

She was only a weak girl, but she was equally bent, heart and soul, on escaping. "Thief! Murderer! Let me go!" she panted.

"For every insult you shall pay me double," with an evil smile, which was ten times more ominous than a frown.

As he held her in his arms and felt her heart thumping in passionate anger, in spite of her beauty, which was heightened by her excitement, he hated her, and vowed to himself that, when she was his wife, she should indeed pay him handsomely for every insolence she had shown him.

"You may as well give them to me, for I swear I'll take them."

"Never—not if I die for it!" wrenching herself away. "Oh, Heaven! help me—help me!"

Suddenly his arms relaxed their hold, and fell down limply by his side.

With a cry she sprang to the door, and the next moment slamming it behind her, flew with fleet steps to the shelter of her own bedroom, where she double-locked the door.

Panting and breathless she threw herself on to the first chair she came to, and burst into a passion of tears; whilst down below, in the library, Philip Falconer found himself face to face with Roy! and she who would have given ten years of her life to see him, missed him by half-a-minute.

(To be continued.)

CINDERELLA'S MARRIAGE.

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CHAPTER X.

MR. GOTT APPEARS.

As Bertie expected, the detective arrived the next morning, and was ushered into the library, and announced to the officer as, "Mr. Gott."

Mr. Gott proved to be a small, thin, sinewy man, with wonderfully soft brown eyes—eyes that had a misty, far-away look in them, tending to deceive the beholder into fancying that they perceived nothing in the actual realms of fact, but were in the habit of seeing visions conjured up by the imagination of their owner.

This, however, was by no means the case, for few men were wider awake than Mr. Hosea Gott.

After introducing himself, and producing his credentials, he stood waiting for the young soldier to speak; and Bertie caught the brown eyes fixed dreamily on his face, and wondered how it was nature had bestowed such soft, gazelle-like orbs on a man—and that man a detective!

"Since sending for you yesterday, a burglary has been committed at the Castle," he began; "and it rather complicates matters, for Lord Thornleigh wishes you to take charge of that case, as well as the one for which I more particularly summoned you. But I had better tell you of the disappearance of the young lady whose whereabouts I am anxious for you to discover."

He then narrated, in as few words as possible, all he knew concerning Lucinda's strange absence, the detective making notes in his pocket book all the while. As he finished Mr. Gott said, in the quiet, suave voice peculiar to him—

"Had the young lady a lover?"

Bertie started violently. A lover—Lucinda! The idea was intensely revolting to him.

"No," he answered, sharply. "Certainly not! She had only just come from school, therefore it would be impossible that she should have a lover."

The detective lifted his eyebrows slightly. Perhaps Captain Carbondell's reasoning did not seem to him quite logical.

"Have you communicated with Miss Richmond's friends?" he asked.

"She has none."

"She is an orphan?"

"Yes."

"And absolutely without relations?"

Bertie hesitated. He had said nothing of Lucinda's earlier history, and he did not wish to advert to it. Gott instantly perceived his hesitation.

"Excuse me, sir," he observed, with quiet firmness; "but, if you wish me to assist you, it is necessary that I should have your full confidence. You cannot expect to run the game to earth, if you throw me off on a false scent to start with."

Carbondell smiled at the sporting metaphor, but at the same time he recognised the truth of what the detective said, and decided to hold back nothing. Accordingly he acquainted his companion with the circumstances under which he first met Lucinda, and the subsequent events of her career, not omitting even the fact of the face at the window which had so startled her.

"And the name of this uncle—do you chance to know it, sir?"

"Yes, it was James Revell."

A strange gleam shot into those soft, brown eyes of the detective, and he repeated the name over in a low undertone. Then he said briefly,—

"Now if you please sir, let me hear full details of the burglary."

After complying with this request Bertie took him upstairs, and, in company with the Earl, showed him where the thieves had entered, and then led him to Lady Christabel's dressing-room, which was across the corridor.

Here they found Lady Christabel herself, and it was she who handed to the detective the chisel which her maid had found, and which she had procured from the Earl that morning. Gott examined it carefully, then put it in his pocket.

"This is a most important clue," he remarked, while his brown eyes shone exultantly, "and I think I may say there is a fair chance of the thieves being caught. At the same time, my idea is, that there was a confederate inside the Castle; for how did the burglars know the different rooms, and how did they come to take away the jewel boxes of the two ladies whose jewels were of the most value? Clearly, they must have had information on these points!"

"Yes," said Lady Christabel, stepping forward, greatly to the astonishment of her father and Bertie. "I agree with you, and I wish to suggest a theory which may or may not be correct. Was it not strange that the governess, Miss Richmond, disappeared just two days before the burglary took place? Is there not some connection between the two circumstances?"

A hasty and horrified negative burst from Carbondell's lips.

Lady Christabel took no notice of it, but turned calmly to the detective.

"It seems to me there can be no doubt on the point, for the girl may have had a dozen disreputable connections for aught we know, and she was assuredly in a position to give them every information. What is your opinion?"

Gott bowed deferentially, and with undisguised admiration in his face.

"The same as your own, my lady. I had made up my mind on the matter before you spoke, and I do not think I am likely to alter my opinion."

Christabel shot a glance of triumph at Bertie, but he shook his head. His faith in his protégée was undisturbed.

The Earl was very much put about by the accusation brought against the governess; but his arguments in favour of the girl quite failed to convince the detective, who held firmly to his expressed belief.

Presently he and Lord Thornleigh left the room, and Bertie followed his cousin into her boudoir, where she took a seat near the window, and taking up a peacock feather fan, began to wave it gently to and fro.

"What reason have you for bringing such a charge against Miss Richmond?" Bertie asked. "You know very little of her—was it fair to condemn her unheard?"

"Perhaps I know more of her than you think!" her ladyship retorted, with a sneering curl of her handsome lips. "Perhaps I understand why you constitute yourself her champion! Anyhow, I am partly aware of the creature's antecedents; and I can only say that I am surprised at your effrontery in allowing her to become a member of this household—or any other respectable one, for the matter of that!"

"Christabel!"

"I understand perfectly what I am saying, and I repeat that you have outraged every sense of decency in bringing that girl here!"

She threw the fan down and stood upright as she spoke, her eyes flashing blue lightning, her scarlet lips curved into an angry, scornful smile.

Most lovely she looked, as the morning sunlight fell upon her. Verily

"A daughter of the gods, divinely tall,
And most divinely fair."

Bertie looked away from her. Even now she exercised over him the charm of Circe of old, and he could not shake himself free from her fascinating influence, angry as he was with her for what she had just said.

"You have no right to use such words to me," he exclaimed, presently; "they are unjustifiable, and wrong me as much as they do that poor child, Lucinda."

She laughed very mockingly.

"You think so? Well, I do not; but I am quite ready to admit that you may not see the matter from my point of view. The subject is not a pleasant one, and we will not discuss it more than is absolutely necessary; but this much I must say to you: whether you succeed in finding the governess or not, she must never return to Thornleigh Castle! It is my father's duty to see that the instructress of his ward shall at least be a lady, and of irreproachable character!"

"And who dares breathe a word against the character of Miss Richmond?" the officer exclaimed, starting up fiercely.

She waved him back with a gesture of supreme contempt.

"It is useless to try these heroics with me, my dear Bertie, for accident has put me in possession of certain facts that speak quite plainly for themselves. I suppose,"—her voice took a still more scornful inflection—"you will not deny that you picked this girl up—Heaven knows how, and Heaven knows where!—some three years ago, and that she stayed with you in your house-boat until you and she went together to the Continent?"

For a minute Bertie was absolutely stupefied by her words. He could only stare at her, in wonder as to where she learned these facts.

"You have so far the instincts of a truthful man that you will not attempt to deny what I say," went on Lady Christabel, picking up her fan again, and seating herself in her former place.

"I do not deny the facts, but I deny the inference you draw from them!" he exclaimed hotly. "This girl is as pure as the angels—of that I will stake my life!"

"Of course you say so. It is an assertion you are in duty bound to make, but—will the world believe you?"

"Will the world believe you!" The words seemed re-echoed in a thousand mocking whispers, and Bertie knew that he could not answer yes! The experience of nearly thirty years had taught him that the world is much more ready to believe evil than good, and the facts themselves were horribly compromising.

His head fell on his hands, and he groaned aloud. This girl whom he had befriended—

this girl whom he had tried his best to help—this girl was destined to have her good name taken away just as she was entering on a career that had every promise of success—and through him! He could defend her from poverty, and ignorance, but neither he nor any man living could defend her from those malicious tongues which would rend her fair fame in pieces, and take from her the dearest possession of womanhood—her honour.

"You wrong her, Christabel!" he exclaimed vehemently. "You wrong her and me too. I confess that what you have heard may be capable of a compromising interpretation, but that interpretation would be an utterly false one. Let me tell you her history, and then you can form your own conclusions—"

She interrupted him unceremoniously.

"On no account! Why should I listen to the history of a person in whom I take not the slightest interest—a girl who has chanced to cross my path once; but who, in six months time I shall have forgotten? It does not matter to me whether you were Miss Richmond's lover, or whether the friendship—there was a bitter sneer in her voice for all her simulated indifference—"between you was as Platonic as you profess. The subject is one that I should not have adverted to, if I had not wished to warn you against attempting to bring the girl back here—supposing you find her. My father is unsuspicious, and easily deceived; it is my duty to see that no advantage is taken of his credulity. And now let us speak of something else—something less disagreeable."

"Wait a moment, if you please," he returned, with a deliberation unusual to him. "I just want to say this much—that I have often heard of the cruelty of women towards women, and I have never believed in it. You, Christabel, have taught me my error. For the future I shall know that a friendless girl has less to fear from men, than from her own sex—it is against *them* she requires protection. The lesson has not been a pleasant one, and I am sorry that fate ordained yours as the lips that should give it me!"

And saying this he rose and left the room, never once looking back to the proud woman sitting there in the sunlight—sitting there with the green monster of jealousy gnawing at her heart, and turning all the gifts that nature had lavished upon her to Dead Sea fruit between her lips!

CHAPTER XI.

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE.

BERTIE did not see Gott again until late the afternoon, and then he met him in the grounds, just as the detective was about entering the Castle.

"Well?" he said, interrogatively. "have you discovered anything fresh?"

Before answering, Gott drew the young officer into the middle of the gravelled walk—he was much too cautious a man to forget the old adage "walls have ears!"

"Not very much, and yet something," he responded, oracularly. "I have seen Williams, the coastguardman, and got from him a description of the man he saw in the rowing-boat on the afternoon of Miss Richmond's disappearance, and so far, the description is satisfactory. I also questioned him as to the direction in which the boat was going, and then went on to the next fishing village, thinking to find out whether it landed its passenger there; but I found this was not the case. However it so happened that the fisherman I spoke to chanced to have been out after his lobster pots on Tuesday afternoon, and while returning, his attention was attracted by a collier lying at anchor some distance from shore. He wondered at this, for she had a fair wind and tide, and he decided that she must be waiting for somebody. Presently he saw a small boat approaching the collier, and a rope was thrown out to the man who was rowing. He secured his skiff, then hoisted up the

figure of a woman on deck—assisted by the man who had thrown him the rope, and who had apparently been on the watch. My informant says his curiosity was aroused, because, from the appearance of the woman, he fancied she must be dead."

Bertie interrupted him by an exclamation of horror, but the detective went on without noticing it.

"For my own part, I can offer no opinion on the point, as it is quite as likely that the girl was dragged, as that she was dead. We shall find that out by-and-by. Now, I have discovered from the coastguardman that this collier went away the same afternoon, but—reappeared yesterday, and was gone again this morning!"

Bertie looked at the speaker inquiringly. He saw that the detective deduced some important conclusion from these facts, but he did not grasp its import.

"Don't you see, sir," said Gott, with a pitying smile for his denseness, "that the vessel probably went off on Tuesday to take the girl away, and disarm suspicion, and came back yesterday for the purpose of landing the burglars, and getting them off safely after the robbery had been committed?"

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Carbonnell, astonished. "Do you really think this was the case?"

"Certainly, I do—and very neatly it was managed. I really must confess that I admire the ingenuity of whoever planned the affair—it does him credit!"

The detective smiled, and rubbed his hands softly together, while his dreamy brown eyes were fixed on Carbonnell's face.

"I will not believe that Lucinda is dead!" exclaimed Bertie, presently, and speaking with vehement conviction. "She is neither dead, nor false—and when we find her, you will be as convinced of her innocence as I myself am."

"Perhaps so, sir—time will show. What we have to do now is to trace the course of that collier, and when we have found where she landed her passengers, then I don't think we shall be far off putting our hands on the thieves."

Bertie looked up suddenly. There was something very significant in the detective's voice.

"I believe you are aware of the identity of the burglars at this moment!"

Gott smiled, and stroked his chin with his forefinger. "Perhaps I am, sir, perhaps I'm not. I would rather not say at present, if you don't mind. You see, in a case like this, it's better not to commit oneself to anything definite. Fresh facts may turn up, and upset one's theory—though I don't fancy they will, this time."

He walked off, still smiling and stroking his chin in placid satisfaction, and that night he left the Castle, without intimating where he was going to.

He returned during the afternoon of the next day, and finding Lord Thornleigh away from home, inquired for Captain Carbonnell, whom he found in the library alone.

"I have traced the collier to Gravesend, sir," he said, plunging into his subject without any further preliminaries. "And now I may tell you that I have ample proof of the author of the burglary. It was your young lady's uncle—James Revel."

Bertie was hardly surprised, for since yesterday he had been thinking continually of the events of the last few days, and he had started a theory of his own to account for them.

"Well!" he said, quietly.

"Well, sir," continued Gott, "the only thing that now remains is to get a warrant out for the apprehension of Revel and his confederate, and take them in charge."

"What made you suspect this man in the first instance?"

"I will tell you, sir. When you, in the course of your communications, mentioned the name

of James Revel, I recognised it at once as the alias of a man who was known to be a receiver of stolen goods, and was suspected of coining counterfeit money. Then Lady Christabel handed me the chain her maid had found. It was quite new, and of peculiar make, and I fancied I could tell the shop from whence it came. So I wired up to Scotland Yard, and directed inquiries should be made, with the result that I was enabled to trace it to this man Revel—by the way, he has dropped that name now, and is called James Jones. He has a tumble-down old house, standing by itself somewhere Rotherhithe way, and quite close to the river, so that you see he has every facility for getting rid of the proceeds of the burglary."

"And you think he has gone there?"

"It is more than likely. Anyhow, I shall procure a warrant to search the house!"

"And Miss Richmond?"

"She may be there or not—I cannot say," returned the detective, cautiously. "But if she is in the house, I will find her."

"Gott!" said Bertie, rising with a sudden resolution, "let me go with you. If Miss Richmond is there, as you seem to think likely, it is my place to rescue her from the power of her abominable uncle!"

Late that night, Bertie, Gott, and a second police officer were wending their way carefully through the dirty, narrow, riverside streets of Rotherhithe. The young man had never been there before, and he looked about him with a vivid curiosity that formed a great contrast to the phlegmatic calm of his companions. The night was dark, and chill, and a faint mist hung over the river, on which glimmered the many lights of different craft lying at anchor, or slowly making their way up stream.

Bertie found his thoughts wandering back to that May evening, three years ago, when he had rescued Lucinda from her self-sought grave. Poor little Cinderella! Her lot had been a hard one, and here she was threatened with fresh dangers, and exposed to fresh hardships—supposing indeed she were still alive.

He knew that Gott had no sort of sympathy with him, and in his heart, resented the young man's desire to accompany him.

The detective had firmly made up his mind that Lucinda had been in league with her uncle, and had given him information concerning the position of the different rooms at the Castle, the hour at which the family dined, and various other matters which it behoved the burglars to know before making their attempt. He was an obstinate man, and held tenaciously to his ideas.

"I think we shall nab him," he remarked to the other police officer, the "he" referring to Revel. "He has slipped through our fingers a good many times, but we've got him pretty safe this time, or else I'm much mistaken!"

The other shook his head doubtfully.

"I wouldn't count on it, if I were you, Mr. Gott. You never know where you are with a clever fellow like Revel! In my opinion, he's just as likely to give you the slip as not."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Gott, testily; and after this the two relapsed into silence, until they came to a high, dark wall, encrusted on the top with broken glass, and having, on the one side, a small, green-painted door—or, at least, it had been green painted once; now, the paint had almost worn off, leaving the surface of the wood quite exposed in several places.

The door was locked, but this difficulty was soon got over by the second policeman, who was a strong, burly fellow, and simplified matters by pressing his whole weight against the woodwork, which speedily gave way beneath it.

Then the trio entered a paved courtyard, and saw before them a dark, red-brick house, very dirty and dilapidated, but bearing on its front traces of having seen better days. As a

matter of fact it had once been the habitation of a rich City merchant, who had built it so as to be close to the docks. But that was years ago, and before Rotherhithe had fallen upon evil days. Since then the house had been let go to wreck and ruin, and now there was hardly a room in it that was water-tight.

Gott and his companions stood for a few seconds looking up at the facade, whose grimy windows were barely visible in the mist.

Not a glimmer of light was to be seen anywhere. An intense silence reigned, unbroken save by the swish of the water against the piles at the back of the house.

"You had better ring the bell," observed Gott to his comrade; whereupon the latter advanced to the door, but was prevented from obeying the order of his superior by the simple fact of there being no bell.

However, he drubbed with his fists against the woodwork, but with no result; and, after waiting five or ten minutes, Gott said, briefly,—

"Break open the door!"

This was done by the united efforts of the three men—for it was of oak, and not so rotten as the other one had been.

Then they found themselves in a somewhat lofty hall, whose dimness was presently illumined by a lantern which Gott had lighted, and whose beams fell upon the faded glories of painted walls and ceiling, from which nearly all the colour had been washed out by damp and mildew.

Dust lay thickly on every ledge, and, from the appearance of the boards, it might be safely assumed that it was some years since they had had a practical acquaintance with soap and water.

Gott held up his finger to impose silence, and the three men stood listening intently.

Not a sound—not even the scratching of a mouse behind a wainscot!

Bertie felt an eerie feeling creep over him as he stood there in the gloom and silence.

There hung on the air that peculiarly-compounded odour of rotting wood and mildew that is so inexpressively suggestive of decay; and the hall itself was damp and chill as a charnel-house.

"Strikes me the bird has flown!" observed the younger of the detectives, scratching his head dubiously.

Gott turned on him with a fierce snarl.

"What's the good of talking like that! Search the house, and don't stand chattering and giving them the chance of giving us the slip!"

The house was well searched—from garret to basement—but with no success. Most of the rooms were quite unfurnished, and in the others there were only a few of such things as were absolutely necessary—a bedstead, a chair, a piece of broken looking-glass. Bertie's heart sank lower and lower. Lucinda was not here; so much seemed certain.

After going carefully over the different rooms, Gott returned to the kitchen. He was deeply disappointed at his non-success, for he had been counting on getting a good reward for the capture of Revel.

"He must have got wind of our intention of coming here, somehow or other," he muttered in an angry undertone. "He's as cute as half a dozen monkeys, that Revel!"

"Then you think he has actually been in the house since the robbery?" asked Bertie.

"Of course he has," answered the detective with profound contempt for the other's ignorance, "look here"—he touched the stove—"it is still quite hot, so that will tell you its own tale. Look at the crumbs underneath the table—they are quite fresh—oh, there are a hundred different signs that tell me that we are only an hour or two too late!"

Bertie followed the direction of Gott's finger, but it was not the crumbs that he noticed. It was something that lay under the table, and would have been unobserved save by the most careful eye, a small mother o'

pearl sleeve link, that he himself had given to Lucinda.

He picked it up, examined it, then passed it on to Gott, explaining to whom it had belonged. The detective shrugged his shoulders.

"The young lady has certainly been here, and has made her escape with the others," remarked, then he came to a sudden pause. "Hush!" he said, "what was that?"

It was like the very far off sound of a woman's voice, raised in supplication or terror. Presently it was repeated—then again, and again.

The three men looked at each other. From the sound of the voice, although it was difficult to exactly define whence it came, Gott fancied it proceeded from below.

And yet they had examined the basement thoroughly—as they imagined.

"Can there be any cellars under here?" muttered the detective; "if so they must be below the level of the river."

He, accompanied by the other two, began his search over again, confining himself to the basement portion of the house, and every now and then there floated up the faint sound of the voice like a far off echo. Gott, who, despite his practical common sense, was by nature superstitious, shivered with a vague sort of dread. He had been in Ireland in his boyhood, and once he had heard a cry just like that—but it had not proceeded from human lips. They had told him it was the wail of the Banshee.

Bertie was powerfully excited, and his hope, which had sunk down to zero, revived. He swore to himself again, that if Lucinda were in the house he would find her.

But the clue to the enigma of the voice was difficult to obtain. Room after room was searched; the walls were sounded, the floors were carefully examined in the hope of finding a trap door, but without avail. The three men returned to the kitchen and looked at each other almost in despair.

"He's too clever for us, that Revel!" muttered the policeman, shaking his head despondingly.

Gott took no notice of the insult—for such he would assuredly have deemed it. He was looking intently at the fireplace—which was a large, old fashioned one, with a big, square hearthstone in front of it.

The detective noticed that although the grate had evidently not been cleaned for some time, and was pretty well choked up with ashes, yet the hearthstone itself was perfectly free from them, and presented a clear, clean expanse, which was rather singular considering the condition of the fireplace generally.

An idea struck Gott. He advanced to the hearthstone and looked at it carefully; then he turned round to the others with a smile of exultation.

"Eureka!" he exclaimed, "I have discovered the trap door, and now we shall catch the thieves like rats in a trap!"

CHAPTER XII.

FOUND!

Yes, it was true. The hearthstone lifted clean out, and then disclosed a view a ladder, which led down to a small, dark, cellar-like chamber, musty with damp, and festooned with cobwebs from wall to wall. Into this the three men descended, and by the light of Gott's lantern, a strange jumble of odds and ends was discovered—carpet bags, old tools, piled up heaps of clothes, and other things too numerous to mention.

But no one stayed to examine these—all pressed forward to a door at the further end of the room which proved to be fastened, but of which the key remained in the lock. Bertie it was who unlocked it, and took a step forward into the gloom which confronted him. Then he paused for a second, and Gott held his lantern up high, so that its rays pierced the darkness beyond.

A moment later a woman's quick, glad cry of joy rang out, and Lucinda threw herself, sobbing violently, on Carbone's breast.

"You have come—you have come!" she cried, hysterically, while unconscious in her excitement of what she was doing—she clasped her two arms round his neck. "Oh, thank Heaven—thank Heaven!"

He echoed her thanksgiving, and holding her to his breast, tried his best to calm her. But his efforts were hardly crowned with success, for the girl's nerves were so thoroughly unstrung that she had almost lost control over herself.

"Take me away!" she cried, wildly. "Take me away from this dreadful—dreadful place!"

"I will take you away, dear," Bertie returned, soothingly. "Don't cry, Cinderella. You are alright now you know. Come—we will go upstairs."

But here Mr. Gott interposed, by laying his hand on the girl's arm.

"You will excuse me, miss, but before you go, I should like to know if you were alone in this cellar, or not," he said, impressed, in spite of himself, by a sense of this girl's good faith.

"Yes, yes," she returned, shuddering. "I was quite alone. Oh the darkness, and the horror of the place—I thought they would drive me mad! Let me get into the light, and then I will tell you all."

Bertie half carried her upstairs to the kitchen, and put her in a chair; then he saw her clearly for the first time, and was shocked at the change these few days had wrought in her. She looked pale, thin, haggard. Her eyes were wild and dilated, and there was a curiously drawn expression about the tremulous lips that touched the young man with a keen sense of pathos.

"My poor Cinderella!" he exclaimed involuntarily, kneeling at her feet, and taking her small cold hands between his. "How ill you look—how you must have suffered!"

"It is all over now—I shall soon forget it," she said, with a tremulous smile. "Somehow I felt all the time that you would find me."

"Did you, dear? I am glad you had faith in me, and more than glad that I have justified your faith. Surely," he continued, with a look of horror,—"You have not been in that dark cellar for long?"

"No, I have only been there for about an hour and a half—certainly not more. My uncle put me there when he and his companion made their escape by the river."

"By the river?"

"Yes; the cellars you see are below the level of the river, but there is an iron door that can be opened at low water, although at high water, it is of course useless. My uncle somehow got warning that the police were coming, so he and his companion escaped through this iron door to a boat that was waiting for them, and would have taken me with them only they were afraid I should betray them. They wanted to swear me to secrecy, but I would not consent."

"And they left you there to die!" cried Bertie, his voice vibrating with horror.

"No, no!" Lucinda exclaimed, hastily. "Bad as my uncle is, he is not so bad as that. He left me plenty of provisions, and I believe it was his intention to liberate me, in a few hours—that is to say, as soon as the police had made their search, and had left the house. He never imagined that they would discover the trap-door."

"Then it was he who broke into Thornleigh Castle, and stole the jewels?"

Bertie regretted the question the moment after he had asked it.

A burning blush suffused the girl's cheeks, her eyes fell, her fingers twined themselves nervously together. She looked the very embodiment of shame.

"Yes," she said, in a choked voice, "it was he!"

"And how was it he got you here?"

As briefly as she could Lucinda narrated the episode of meeting Revel in the caves, and her threat to warn Lord Thornleigh of the

intended burglary. Then, she said, there was a blank in her consciousness, and when she recovered from the effects of the drug that had been administered to her she found herself on board a small vessel, which was lying at anchor. She was not permitted to go on deck, and so it was difficult to tell how long she remained there; but she was finally brought by water to Rotherhithe, and kept a prisoner to the house, watched over, either by her uncle, or by an elderly man, who seemed to be his confederate, and was called "Jim."

"They knew that if I contrived to escape I should tell all I knew about the robbery!" she added, in conclusion; "and so they were most careful to give me no chance of getting away. My uncle, however, repeatedly assured me no harm was intended me, although he said that he could, and would make me remain with him until I was twenty-one!"

"And do you chance to know where your uncle may now be hiding?" asked Gott, who had come quietly up the ladder, and heard every word the girl had said.

She turned her clear grey eyes upon him, and shook her head.

"I do not." Then she added, after a slight pause, "But if I did, I don't think you would gain much, for, from what I heard pass between the two men, I conclude that the proceeds of the robbery have been disposed of, and so there would be no prospect of getting the jewels back."

The two detectives decided to remain in the house until the morning.

Captain Carbone was all anxiety to get Lucinda out of the way, before there was any possibility of her uncle's return.

When they got outside they found the night had cleared, and the stars were shining from between the rifts in the clouds. The girl, who was clinging to Bertie's arm, lifted her face to the sky; and a prayer, all the deeper because voiceless, went up from the bottom of her heart, thanking Heaven for its mercy in aiding her escape from her uncle's power.

They had to walk some considerable distance before they found a cab—for cabs were not very plentiful in the neighbourhood they had just left; and when at length they met one, Bertie was in a dilemma as to where he should give the order to be driven to. After a minute's consideration, he said,—

"Drive to the Grand Hotel!" and then he sprang in, and took his seat by the side of Lucinda.

Once or twice he stole a glance at her. She was very pale, but the expression on her face was one of perfect contentment. She was with him—what more could her heart desire?

Neither of them spoke during the drive, which was a very long one. There were feelings in Lucinda's heart too deep for words; and Bertie himself was the prey of a thousand conflicting emotions.

What could he do with the girl now that he had found her?

It was clearly impossible to take her back to Thornleigh Castle, bearing in mind the scornful words Lady Christabel had spoken regarding the young governess; and it would be equally impossible to get her another situation without giving satisfactory references. Already the breath of scandal had fallen on her fair fame, and by letting her be seen in his company, he was only giving added colour to the slander.

Luckily he was well known at the Grand Hotel, and thus, although it was so late, he had no difficulty in engaging rooms for himself and Lucinda.

He sent the girl immediately to her apartment, but it was some hours later before he retired to his own, and then he could not sleep for thinking over the pros and cons of the situation; but think as he might, he could see no satisfactory way out of the difficulty.

One sentence Lucinda had spoken kept recurring to him with painful persistence. "My Uncle said he could, and would, make me remain with him until I was twenty-one!"



[A WOMAN'S GLAD CRY OF JOY RANG OUT, AND LUCINDA THREW HERSELF, SOBBING, ON CARBONNELL'S BREAST!]

There could be no doubt that Mr. James Revel had every legal right to his niece's company, and if he chose to assert his right, there would be no one to gainsay it. Of course, under present circumstances, there was no chance of his stepping forward, and claiming Lucinda; but the fact that he might do so, would hang over the girl like a shadow, night and day.

"If she were married—if she had a good husband, then she would be all right, and no one could molest her," he muttered, restlessly, as he pulled the long waxed ends of his moustache.

He started violently. A sudden idea had occurred to him, but he drove it back. Nevertheless, it returned again and again.

Why not marry her himself?

He sprang out of bed, and began to dress hastily, as if he thought that by these means he could change the current of his reflections. But it was no good. A voice within him said,—

"She is young, beautiful, and refined, in spite of her humble birth. She is very devoted to you, and would make you a good wife. On the other hand, you would then be in a position to protect her and make her happy. It is true you love another woman, but that woman will soon be Lord Earncliffe's wife, and so she is out of the question. Marry Lucinda, and secure her happiness, if not your own."

Bertie laughed grimly at his reflection in the mirror, as he brushed out his thick golden curls. Marry a wail whom he had picked up out of the river—a girl who had neither birth nor fortune!

Well, she was pure, gentle, and refined, let her connections be what they might, and after all, a man did not marry his wife's family. Besides, what had he to offer her that would outweigh her youth and beauty?

Bertie was nothing if not impulsive, and by the time he descended to the coffee room, his mind was made up. He found Lucinda

already there, sitting at one of the small round tables, with her eyes fixed on the door.

How those eyes brightened when they fell upon him! The flush that rose to her face, changed it as the sunshine changes a cold grey landscape, and she rose and took a step or two forwards to meet him.

Carbonnell was startled. He was not a vain man, but no one in the world could mistake the eloquence of those deep, true eyes of hers. They said as plainly as words, "I love you!"

"Well," he said, with an attempt at gaiety, as he seated himself opposite her, "how have you rested?"

"I have not slept very much, if that is what you mean," she responded, returning his smiles. "I think I was too excited to sleep, but I feel almost as well and refreshed as if I had done so."

They had breakfast together, and neither spoke much. A good many eyes were turned in their direction, for the coffee room was full, and they were too handsome a couple to fail to attract attention. When the meal was over Bertie told Lucinda to go and put on her hat and mantle.

"I want to take you for a walk," he said, in a voice whose significance she understood later on. "And, when we are out in the open air, I want to ask you a question."

Lucinda looked a little surprised, but went obediently to do his bidding; and when she came downstairs, found him waiting in the hall.

As they left the hotel, he drew her arm through his, and led her down to the Thames Embankment.

It was a fine autumnal morning. A faint blue mist hung like a silvery veil over the river, but the air was soft and mellow, and the sky like azure.

"Sit down," Bertie said, leading her to a seat, and taking a seat beside her. "Are you not anxious to hear what my question is

She smiled brightly up into his face.

"Yes. What is it?"

"I want to ask you if you will be my wife?"

The words were spoken. The die was cast.

For a few minutes Lucinda sat perfectly still, her hands lying clasped on her lap, her very lips white with emotion. Then she turned a pair of piteous, swimming eyes to his.

"You cannot mean it! Oh! it is impossible!" she exclaimed, brokenly, and yet with a latent indignation in her voice. "Why do you say this to torture me?"

"Torture you! My little girl, I am in most serious earnest! I mean every word I say! Do you think you can love me enough to become my wife?"

Again she looked at him, and the expression in his eyes seemed to convince her of his sincerity.

She gave a quick little gasp, and her head drooped forward on her bosom.

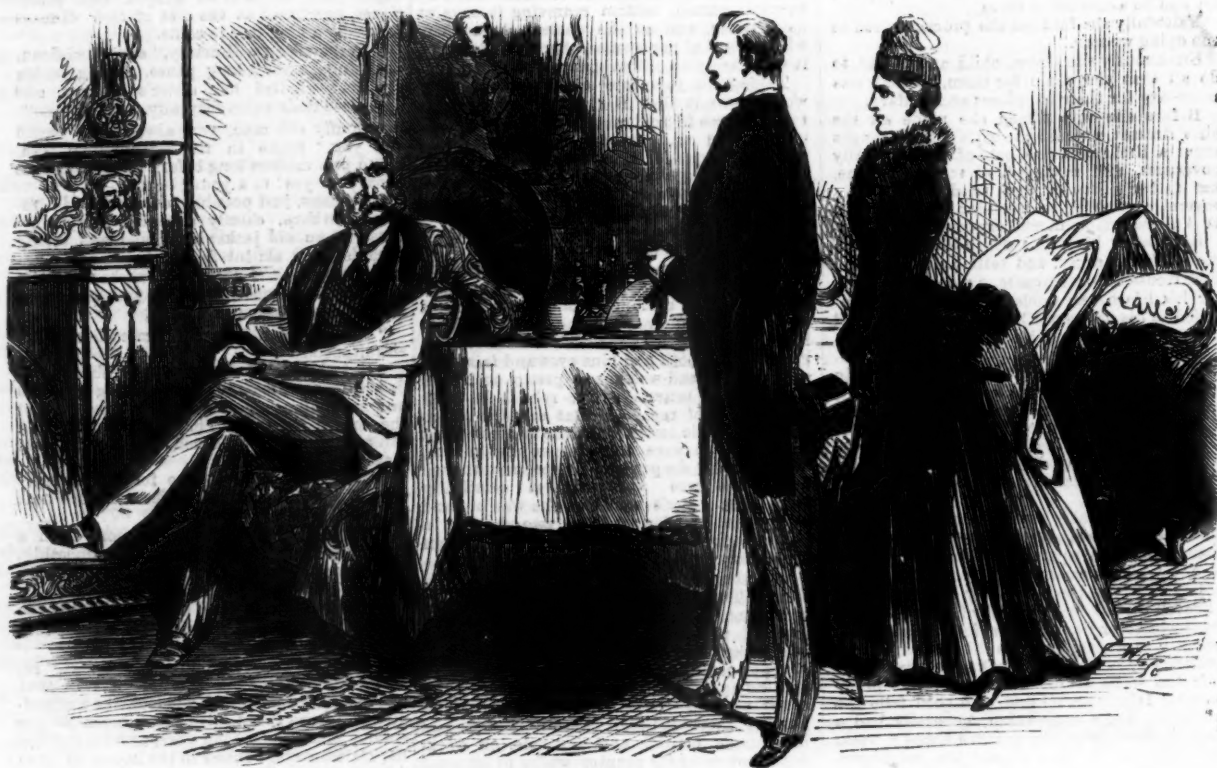
"I love you!" she said, in a very low voice. "I love you so well that to be near you is happiness; but to become your wife! Oh! I must be dreaming!"

"A happy dream!" he said, very gently, clasping one of her hands in his. "It shall be the effort of my life to keep you from an awakening!"

And thus, while the river flowed on its way to the great unknown sea, they two were betrothed. And the sun shone, and the ripple played like diamonds on the water; and there was no warning voice to tell Lucinda that she had set the seal to a future from whose anguish, could she have seen it, she would have drawn back in terror.

And yet her answer to his wooing might have been the same, for she loved him with that love which is oblivious of everything but itself—the love that is not for a year or a day, but for ever and for ever!

'To be continued.'



[MAJOR TEMPLEMORE WAS SIPPING HIS COFFEE WITH THE LAZYGUY AIR OF A MAN OF FASHION.]

NOVELLATEE.]

THREE YOUNG MAIDS.

—O—

CHAPTER I.

"There were three young maids of Lee,
They were as fair as fair could be."

"It's ridiculous!" exclaimed Nan Templemore. "Here we are, the three prettiest girls in or about Braithwaite, and not one of us is married, or engaged, or even has a lover, not even an undeclared one. A mere dangler. It's disgraceful!" and she raised her blue eyes to the ceiling with an air of mock horror that was very comical, and made both her sisters laugh.

"You forget how poor we are," said fair-haired Joan, still laughing.

"No I don't," retorted Nan, with more fervour than politeness. "Nor that other girls just as poor get a chance of entering the 'holy estate.'"

"They have probably chances and opportunities that we lack," observed Barbara, the eldest of the three, with her usual gravity of manner.

"What opportunities, Bab?" cried Nan, eagerly. "Pray, explain!"

"Well-to-do aunts, uncles or cousins," put in Joan, a twinkle in her azure eyes, "eh, Bab?"

"I should think so," rejoined Miss Templemore promptly. "People who ask them to visit at their country houses, or give them a season now and again in town, where they have chances of meeting eligible men."

"I observe you don't say young men," remarked Nan, looking at her sister, a twinkle similar to that of Joan's eyes in her own.

"No, I said men. It does not follow because a man is old or elderly that he's not eligible for matrimony."

"Certainly not; and some day, Bab, we

shall see you assisting to the altar some snuffy, tottering, bald-headed old gentleman, with an abnormally high collar and gold-rimmed spectacles, but whose pockets will be well lined with the 'mammon of unrighteousness.'"

"You would, no doubt, if I had the chance of meeting such an one. But," and Bab sighed mournfully, "I shall never have it."

"Don't be so cast down," said Joan, encouragingly. "Nan or I may attract the attention of some penniless curate at one of the many churches we attend, or Charlie may introduce us to a briefless barrister, then your fortune will be made, though not ours."

"How?"

"We can ask you on a visit, and give a dinner after hunting up all the old fogies we know. Then you can get the much-to-be-desired octogenarian up in a corner, and tell him how clever you are at making mustard-plasters and oatmeal gruel, and other things necessary for the aged and infirm."

"I was not aware that penniless curates or briefless barristers could give dinner-parties," replied Miss Templemore, with mild sarcasm.

"We'd manage it somehow, you may be quite sure. Even if we went without dinner ourselves for a week, and had to content ourselves with a scratch meal of eggs and radishes. It would be in a noble cause, and we would make martyrs of ourselves willingly."

"Whom do you mean by 'we'?" questioned Barbara, gravely.

"Husband and self," replied Joan, briefly.

"Self might be martyred in the cause, doubt if husband would."

"Remember, I mean to marry for love."

"And so do I," cried lively Nan.

"You should add, my dears, 'if we can.'"

"Of course that goes without saying."

"Still, allowing that the curate and barrister are duly caught and married, I doubt, even the love being admitted and genuine,

their sacrificing themselves on account of a sister-in-law, who will doubtless, by the time that great event takes place, be an old trump."

"Why, Bab, you are only twenty-three!"

"Well?"

The calm, brown eyes met the sparkling blue eyes questioning.

"You won't be an old trump for years!"

"In ten, I shall be going down the hill of youth, rapidly retreating from all that is fair and fascinating. At thirty-four I shall be a middle-aged woman!"

There was conviction in the speaker's tone and manner, and the younger sisters, looking at her, were fain to acknowledge that there might be truth in what she said.

Barbara was shorter than they were, and inclined to *embonpoint*. Her face was handsome, but cold in type, and gave promise of becoming heavy-looking as the years wore on. Her hair was a deep, dead brown; her skin absolutely colourless, though there was no suggestion of ill-health about the perfectly white complexion; while her straight black brows and firm mouth gave character and decision to a countenance that somehow or other looked as if it had never been very young or child-like.

Perhaps her early life and varied and hard experiences had left an indelible mark on it.

Before she was nine her mother died, leaving baby Nan, little over a year old, to her charge, Joan four, and Charlie six.

Though Major Templemore was alive, and present at the death-bed scene, his unhappy wife never thought of leaving her babies to his tender mercies.

She knew the hard, shallow, selfish nature too thoroughly to intrust the welfare of her little helpless children to his care. So it was to Barbara, self-contained, sedate, womanish Barbara that the fast glazing eyes turned with an imploring look of anguish in their depths, and it was Barbara who promised to

look after her little brother and sisters, and try and be a mother to them.

Faithfully she fulfilled the promise given to the dying woman.

Strenuously she strove, child as she was, to do all that she could for them, all that was necessary for their happiness and welfare.

Before she was fifteen she made all the girls' dresses, patched the boy's clothes, taught them a little with the help of a cheap daily governess, and managed, at the same time, her father's house, and tried to make a sovereign go as far as five—for that was what that unreasonable mortal expected her to do.

Soon after his wife's death Major Templemore left the army, and settled down in the Red House at Braithwaite, a place left to him for his life by an uncle, and fortunately entailed to his only son, Charlie, or else it would have been sold, and his children left homeless.

Here, in the big and home, with its shady garden, on the outskirts of Braithwaite, he managed to live on his pension, given him for a nasty wound received in the Crimean war. Grumbling, and grumbling at his offspring continually, and caring not at all how they fared so long as he was comfortable and had what he wanted.

His old instincts and likings remained—those he had been able to gratify when a rich man, before he squandered the fortune left him by his parents; and his only aim and object in life was to have tasty dinners served at seven o'clock, with a flask of good wine; to hunt whenever he could, for following the red rogue was a passion with him, and one he gratified by hook or by crook; and, being outside the walls of his own home, like many another Irishman, no end of a good fellow, a pleasant, lively companion, generally had a mount offered him two or three times a week, for some of the rich men in the neighbourhood liked the dulness of the greater part of their guests relieved by the flashes of his brilliant wit and sparkling conversation, and racy anecdotes, told with point and humour.

Another pastime he indulged in was fishing, and Barbara regarded this sport with kinder eyes, as he provided choice morsels for his own table, and saved the housekeeping expenditure by bringing home two or three brace of speckled trout, a jack, bream, and sometimes salmon.

As to hunting, she detested it, for the Major always followed in the orthodox pink, and tops and tights, and as it fell to her lot to clean and prepare his hunting clothes, and as he swore at her roundly if they were not as spick and span as if turned out by a first-class valet, it was hardly to be wondered at that she hated November to arrive, and was glad when April came with its perfume of violets, that made it difficult for scent to lie, and hunting was over.

Moreover, it entailed numerous little expenses that they could ill afford, and when there was no money to pay the "butcher's, baker's, and candlestick maker's" bills, in consequence thereof, it was she who had to face the infuriated and long-suffering tradespeople, and quiet them as she best could until the next quarter came round, and her amiable parent reluctantly doled out a scanty portion of the not very large pension, reserving the lion's share for himself and his selfish pleasures, concerning himself not at all that Nan's toes were sticking through her shoes, that Joan's petticoats were half way up her legs, by reason of her rapid growth, and the length of time which elapsed between her receiving new frocks, that Charlie was out at elbows and knees, altogether ragamuffin in appearance, totally unfit to go to the large cheap, semi-public school the town boasted, where a good education might be had for a ridiculously small sum per annum.

As to her own wants Barbara was silent. She never asked for anything for herself, yet it was wonderful how neat she always looked in a plain black dress, and a clean collar, the former of which she protected with a huge

white linen apron, similar to those worn by hospital nurses, seldom removing it save at meal times, and as she washed them along with several of her own and her sister's things, it was hardly an extravagance.

Taking all this into consideration, what wonder was it that Barbara Templemore at twenty-three felt old, and knew she would be middle-aged and frumpish in appearance while still young? Such a childhood as hers, such a hard nightmare of difficulties and disagreeables, was bound to make her old before her time, to drive all romance and sentimentality out of her nature, leaving her commonplace, calculating and prosaic.

Both her sisters were romantic to the tips of their fingers, and pretty enough to warrant the belief that romance would form part of their lives. They were tall and slenderly built, and carried themselves easily and gracefully. Both had blue eyes and fair hair, only Joan's head was not so pretty as Nan's. Through the latter's curly, rebellious locks ran a shade of red gold, that made it gleam with a metallic lustre when the sun shone on it. Her eyes were of a deeper darker blue, her colouring deeper and richer, and though Joan's features were almost classically regular, and her's were not, she was out and away the prettier of the two, having a piquant, fascinating way about her that was irresistibly charming and attractive.

Still their good looks were of little use to them. Their father did not encourage callers, and refused all invitations for them, which some of the county and town folk in pity sent; even if he had not done so, it is doubtful if they could have accepted them, having nothing appropriate to wear. It was just as much as they could do to turn out on a Sunday morning for church neatly and becomingly attired, and, as a rule, on week-days they went for country walks or lounged in the great shady garden, which, surrounded by a high, red wall, effectually shut out prying glances, and where they helped Barbara to rear and cultivate the beautiful blooms, which, by sending up to London, she managed to make a little money out of, which the girls looked upon as their own private property, and spent in supplementing the scanty sum their father gave them to dress on and as pocket-money.

The officers of the regiment stationed at Braithwaite Major Templemore never dreamt of inviting across his threshold, though he was not backward in accepting an invitation to mess on guest nights; but as they were only a line regiment, and most of the officers poor, he thought it would be useless to waste any civility on them as they could not offer him a mount, and had no trout streams or salmon rivers to offer for his sport and pastime.

Nevertheless, some of the subalterns gave rather pointed hints that an introduction to his pretty daughters, and leave to play tennis within the precincts of the high red walls would be very acceptable and pleasant to them.

To these and similar hints, Terrence Templemore turned a deaf ear. He had no intention of wasting his rare guineas on a set of poor "subs," not he, indeed. He concentrated his efforts on a dinner that he gave once a year at the end of the hunting season, when he asked ten or a dozen of his special chums to the big red house, gave the local confectioner and wine merchant a *carte blanche*, and regaled his friends with a bachelor dinner, perfect in every respect, with choice wines and choice dishes, hot-house flowers and foreign fruits, and while he and his friends gorged in the dining-room, amid the relics of bygone splendour, that had appertained to his deceased uncle, his four children drank weak tea and sky-blue, and ate dry bread in the bare, sparsely furnished schoolroom, where the black oak boards were guiltless of rug or carpet, the curtains and hangings old and faded, and the furniture worn and dilapidated.

Still they were merry and glad over their frugal meal, as young things should be, and grudged not their father his devilish kid-

neys, *foie-gras*, muscat grapes, and comet claret, purchased at the cost of their dinners for many a long day to come.

"Perhaps you will marry," suggested Joan, doubtfully, after a long pause, during which she had studied her sister's charms, and appraised their value mentally. "This—"

"Snuffy old man, you always say would suit you," broke in the irrepressible Nan, "and be a matron long before we get a chance of saying 'yes' to a young one."

"Perhaps, just possible, not probable," replied Barbara, calmly snatching away vigorously at an old jacket which she was trying with deft and skilful fingers to manufacture into a new one. "There is more chance of my being an untouched negress, and pining in single blessedness all my life."

"Not if we can help it!" cried her sisters simultaneously.

"But you can't help it, dears!" she responded, with an altogether unexpected coolness and nonchalance, giving a little wise nod of the brown head. "That is just it. You can't help yourselves, much less me, who am older and plainer."

"There is plenty of time for me to try," cried Nan. "I am not seventeen until next May."

"You, of course, are little more than a child," continued Miss Templemore, smoothly. "You can't expect your chances to come for another couple of years."

"Not in fact till your elders are out of the way," smiled Joan. "Remember, please, that I was nineteen at Christmas."

"It is well you remind me of the fact," retorted the baby of the family, "for in that disgracefully short front you look like a school-girl," and she gazed with great scorn at the shabby black frock Joan wore, a remnant from her girlish days, donned in the house to save a better one.

"My misfortune, not my fault," grimaced the other as she pirouetted round, and sent her short skirts up with a twirl and a twist. "When you are a Countess you can remember your poor sisters, give us 'outdoor' relief, send down a few of your cast-off smart gowns."

"I mean at least to be a duchess!" laughed Nan, tossing back her ruddy, gold-tressed head. "Nothing short of a strawberry-leaf coronet and a duke will do for me!"

"Won't a coronet suit you?" said a voice in the doorway; and turning with an exclamation of surprise, she saw Charlie.

The next moment she was in his arms, hugging and kissing him with all a child's abandonment and glee, for they were all very fond of the brother who promised to be their salvation; for, instead of following in his father's steps, and being wild, and fast, and good-for-nothing, he was working steadily in a lawyer's office, and for the past year had been bringing a little grist to the mill.

"You're home early, Charlie, aren't you?" said Barbara, as he kissed her, lifting her head for a moment to receive the caress, and then going on with her work, eager to catch the last faint rays of light, for the short winter's day was rapidly drawing to a close.

"Yes, a little. We weren't quite so busy to-day as usual."

"Any news?" asked Joan.

"What did you mean about a Colonel?" queried Nan, simultaneously, seizing hold of the lapel of his coat, and compelling his attention.

"Do you very much want to know?" he asked, smiling down fondly into the pretty, eager, upraised face.

"To be sure I do," she responded promptly, giving the coat a little tug. "Colonels are not, like blackberries, plentiful about Braithwaite!"

"There's the Colonel Dean," he suggested, slyly.

"Old, bald-headed, red-faced, fat horror!" "If he weren't married he might do for Bab!" laughed Joan.

"Admirably!" assented that young person,

with her usual coolness: "for I am told he is well off."

"You'd better ask Mrs. Colonel here to tea, and butter the stairs before she leaves; then she'll fall down and, being ancient, probably die!"

"Charlie! Don't be so wicked," he replied, demurely.

"And about the other Colonel?" pleaded Nan. "Do tell me?"

"Well, I saw father talking to Colonel Tresillion at the three cross-roads."

"Colonel Tresillion! Why, Bab, here's a chance for you!" cried the girl, vivaciously. "He is one of dad's dearest chums, and, of course, an old fogey!"

"He's nothing of the kind," corrected Charlie. "He's very handsome, and not a day more than forty-five if so much."

"That's very old!" declared Nan, gravely; and, indeed, in her young eyes, it seemed a great age.

"Rubbish!" retorted her brother. "A man's only in his prime at that age. Wait till you're as old, and see what a chicken you'll think yourself."

"I shan't be so foolish!"

"Oh, yes you will. I say, Bab," turning to his eldest sister, "what will you do if our amiable parent brings the Colonel here to regale him on dainties?"

"I am sure I don't know," sighed Bab, dimly; for, like Mother Hubbard of nursery-lore renown, "her cupboard was bare" of dainties, and only contained coarse and commonplace fare.

"He'll want turtle, and truffles, champagne, and brandy-and-soda!" said Joan, polling a long face.

"No, I don't think that," replied Miss Templemore. "I remember his coming here eight or nine years ago, when you girls were staying at Nurse Liza's, and staying here for a few days. He seemed very easy to please, and simple in his tastes."

"Yes; he's no end of a fine fellow!" agreed Charlie, warmly. "I remember how he used to play cricket with me in the paddock, and how many shillings and half-crowns he tipped me during the short time he stayed here."

"Then he won't be so bad if he does come?" cried Nan.

"Bad? It will be delightful!" declared young Templemore.

"Only think, girls, he has no less than six medals. What do you say to that?"

"A perfect hero," laughed Joan. "Bab, you are in luck's way. I envy you your soldier."

"Don't jest," said Bab, almost crossly. "What am I to do if father does bring him home, and nothing in the house?"

"Buy something," suggested Charlie, sentimentally.

"No money," shaking her head dolefully.

"Then—let's have tea," he remarked coolly, dragging a bag of cakes out of his pocket, and laying them on the table.

CHAPTER II.

"Sweet and fair, with a winsome grace
That lies not all in her bonny face."

BARBARA rose, and folding up the jacket put it away in a corner, and then began preparations for tea. In this she was ably assisted by Joan and Nan, Charlie looking on from the depth of a great arm-chair, while his sisters spread the coarse, but snowy, cloth, fetched the cups and saucers from the kitchen, platter and huge loaf, and an extremely small pat of butter, and a tiny jug of milk.

Then, while Miss Templemore spooned out a small quantity of tea, Nan possessed herself of a huge roasting fork, presented another to Joan, and forthwith began to toast herself and the cakes before the cheery fire.

"Let's have an omelet," suggested Charlie,

suddenly. "It's an age since we've had one."

"There are only eggs enough in for father's breakfast," interposed Barbara, quickly.

"Four will be enough for us," went on her brother, counting out fourpence from his slender stock. "Let me have that number, and Sarah can fetch some more for our A. P."

Thus besought, the mistress of Red House gave way, and soon all the paraphernalia for making an omelet, at which Charlie was a famous hand, stood on a little table by the fire, and the young fellow with his sleeves tucked up, was beating eggs and chopping onions; while Nan, relinquishing the cake toasting to her sisters, was busy helping him, and melting a lump of butter in the frying pan.

Presently it was done to a turn, and seating themselves at the big table they were on the point of attacking the tempting fare with all the eagerness of young, healthy, underfed appetites, when, horror of horrors, the door opened, and Major Templemore walked in, followed by a stranger—a man whose erect bearing, closely-cropped hair, and great drooping tawny moustache plainly proclaimed him a soldier.

For a full moment consternation was visible on each young face, and Terrence Templemore looked black as thunder, for there was more than a suspicion of the scent of onions in the air, the frying-pan was stuck up in a corner of the fender, broken egg shells, a whipper, a pudding basin, and sundry other kitchen utensils were piled higgledy-piggledy on the little round table by the fire-place, and the light that blazed from a solitary globeless gas jet displayed all these things plainly, as well as master Charlie's tucked up shirt sleeves, for in the ardour of cooking he had cast off his coat, and Joan's shabby dress, and Bab's big, cocklike apron, and Nan's lovely flushed face and tumbled ruddy locks.

For a moment the amiable parent hesitated, scowling, then remembering that Rhoderick Tresillion, though full twenty years his junior, had been and was his most intimate friend, well acquainted with all his affairs, and scarcity of cash, and that he was always willing to lend or give him anything he wanted out of his ample income, came forward laughing with affected bonhomie.

"Well, young people, you seem to be enjoying yourselves in a rough-and-ready fashion. I have brought a visitor to see you who wishes to renew his acquaintance with some of you, and become acquainted with the rest."

"Yes, father," said Barbara, rising and offering her hand to the stranger, whom she recognised as Colonel Tresillion.

"Do you remember me, Miss Templemore?" he asked, pleasantly.

"Perfectly well," she replied, quietly, having recovered her usual calmness.

"And so do I," exclaimed her brother, getting up to greet the guest.

"Let me see you are—Charlie?"

"Yes."

"And these are the rest of my bears," smiled the Major, jocosely, indicating Joan and Nan by a move of the hand. "This is Joan, and this Nan, the baby of the family."

The "baby" got up and shook hands with the Colonel shyly, not daring to look at him, being overwhelmed by the consciousness of a shabby gown, flushed cheeks, and unkempt locks, thereby missing the look of admiration he levelled at her.

"Delighted to have the pleasure of meeting you," he said earnestly. "I often tell your father that I envy him immensely having home ties, some one to welcome him when he comes in, and speed him on his way when he goes out, make his house comfortable for him."

"This doesn't look very comfortable," sneered Terrence. "Seems as though they had mistaken it for the kitchen."

"Charlie has been making an omelet," explained Nan, who was bolder than the rest; and stood less in awe of her father.

"And it is getting cold," smiled Tresillion.

"Yes. Charlie makes such jolly ones," continued the girl, confidentially, her blue eyes wandering to where the tempting morsel lay bubbling and frothing on its dish.

"It looks very—jolly," agreed the Colonel, hesitating just a second over the slang word to which his tongue was unaccustomed, "and the cakes, too."

"I toasted some of them," she told him in childish glee.

"Then they must be nice."

"Will you try some?" she suggested, for she was getting desperately hungry, and thought herself of this expedient for beginning the postponed meal.

"I should like to very much."

"Barbara," said Templemore at that moment. "Can you let us have some dinner at seven o'clock?"

"Yes, father," she replied faintly, for it was now nearly six, and there was nothing in the house ready, save a little soup, yet she could not say no.

Tresillion's quick eye noted her expression of dismay, and knowing how short his friend always was, he guessed the cause at once, and hastened to relieve Bab's anxiety.

"Don't trouble about dinner for me," he said, quickly. "I should like to have tea here with the young people, if I may!"

"Oh, nonsense," began Templemore.

"I've had one invitation," pursued the guest, smiling at Nan, who grew suddenly distressfully red and embarrassed.

"It's such a den," declared his host disparagingly, casting a contemptuous look around.

"I like dens," declared the Colonel.

"Only fit for young bears like these unruly children of mine," went on Terrence, who invariably posed as a martyr to his offspring.

"I like bears, too," laughed Tresillion, "and I mean to try some of Master Charlie's omelet," and suiting the action to the word he slipped into a chair between Nan and Joan, and helped himself to a piece of the former's toasted cake.

"Well, of course, if you will—" began the Major again.

"Yes, I will, and it wouldn't do to have a heavy dinner now, for you know I want you to sup with me at the hotel to-night."

"Delighted to," said the wily Irishman, pleased at the prospect of a good meal at his friend's expense, and saving his own viands. "Barbara, give me a cup of tea."

Obediently Miss Templemore filled a cup for him and one for Tresillion, then ringing for Sarah, she had the cooking utensils removed, and diving into her pocket produced the keys, and presently the ancient handmaiden came back with a jar of preserves and some marmalade, and a fresh pot of tea and a couple more cups and saucers; and then they all set to work on Charlie's omelet, that luckily was a big one, and proved sufficient for each one to have a bit.

"Are you fond of cooking?" asked the guest of Nan, his eyes resting again admiringly on the downbeat gold head.

"Pretty well," she replied. "I like making toffy or hardbake."

"What a child it is," he thought. "What a lovely, innocent child!"

"And you don't care for roasting or boiling, the drudgery part of it?" he went on aloud, his pleasant grey eyes full of mirth and amusement.

"No, and I never get a chance of doing any of it. Bab wouldn't let me. She says I should spoil the joint, and that then it would not be fit for father to eat."

"So you would," chimed in Joan.

"You haven't a great opinion of your sister's culinary powers," he queried, turning to look at the fair-haired girl at his other side.

"She makes very good bull's eyes," replied Joan, tranquilly, her mouth full of cake and jam.

"Bull's eyes!" repeated Tresillion somewhat mystified.

"Sugar, butter, and peppermint made into rounds, and browned," explained the girl.

"Oh, I see. She makes those well?"

"Yes."

"And you like them?"

"Yes. We all like them."

"Not as well as Bab's soft toffee," cried Nan, with sparkling eyes. "That's nearly as good as chocolate."

"Are you fond of chocolate?" asked the Colonel.

"Awfully fond. Like it better than anything else."

"Then I suppose you consume a large quantity of it?"

"No, I don't. I should like to, but we can't afford to buy it," she replied with childlike candour.

"Then you must let me give you some."

"Oh, thanks," the blue eyes sparkling like stars, left the pleasant bronzed face, and travelled across the table to fix themselves questioningly on Major Templemore's disagreeable one.

"Terrence, have I your permission to give this young lady some chocolates?" asked his friend, who with his usual quickness had interrupted the glance.

"Of course, Tresillion. Anything you like, my dear fellow. Chocolate will be much better for her than the horrible concoctions she makes herself."

"They are not horrible!" declared Nan, indignantly.

"I think they are," retorted her father.

"A slight difference of opinion, that is all," laughed Tresillion. "You must show me which is the best shop in Braithwaite for bonbons."

"Clutterby's is the best," replied the girl at once; "but they are awfully expensive!"

"That does not matter. They can hardly be as expensive there as at Charbonnel's."

"Who is Charbonnel?" asked Joan.

"A *bonbonniere* in Bond-street."

"Bond-street. That is in London, isn't it?" queried the younger sister, her attention equally divided between the topic under discussion and a huge slice of bread-and-marmalade.

"Yes. Do you know Charbonnel's?"

"No. I have never been in London. None of us have except Charlie."

"Regular young savages, you see, Tresillion," chimed in the Major. "Haven't been anywhere, haven't seen anything; know nothing of London society or the *beau monde*."

"All the better for that," replied his friend, warmly. "They are all the more natural and charming!"

"Do you think we are charming?" asked Nan, in blank amazement, sitting with the bread-and-marmalade poised half-way to her mouth.

"Yes; I think you are," smiled the Colonel, letting his eyes rest critically on the fair face beside him, with its star-like eyes and wild rose bloom.

"How nice!" and she clapped her hands delightedly. "Barbara always says I am a Tomboy, that Joan is quite silly with romantic ideas, and that she's an old tramp!"

"My dear Nan—" began Bab, expostulatingly.

"Miss Templemore is not complimentary," remarked Tresillion, the smile broadening as he glanced at Barbara sitting stiffly upright at the head of the table, looking as though there were a strong spice of the old maid about her.

"She is truthful, though," observed Charlie, with a grin. "Joan is always dreaming about lovers and marriage!"

"Charlie! how can you?" exclaimed that young person, indignantly.

"And as to Nan," without taking the slightest notice of his sister's interruption, "she's the greatest Tomboy I know. She can climb any tree, knows where all the birds' nests are, plays cricket, rounders, fishes like a true Walton, follows the beagles when she gets a chance—"

"Which isn't often!" put in Nan, tranquilly.

"And would ride to hounds like a mad thing, and be in at the death like any whip!" concluded young Templemore.

"To be sure I would, if I got the chance! I'm only sorry I don't!"

"And I am glad you don't!" remarked her father; "for I am sure you would break your neck!"

"If she didn't, it wouldn't be for want of dare-devil riding!" said her brother.

"Are you very fond of riding?" asked Tresillion.

"Very! only I never get the chance of riding anything but an old blind Shetland pony that belongs to our washerwoman; and that only goes at a jog trot at best."

"Which doesn't suit you?"

"Not at all. I should like a great big black horse, like that Lord Lenny sometimes lends father, which rolls its eyes, and champs at the bit, and rushes madly at or over every obstacle."

"Not exactly the sort of horse for a lady to ride, I should say!"

"Perhaps not; but exactly suited to a Tomboy!" retorted Nan, an extra sparkle in the azure orbs.

From which speech, and the mutinous curl of the rosy lips, Colonel Tresillion concluded Miss Nan had a will of her own, and a wit which only wanted intercourse with the great world to make keen and brilliant.

"Then I shall come to-morrow morning to take you to Clutterby's," he said, when he and his host were preparing to depart for the hotel, and a choice little supper served in the Royal's best style.

"Yes, please," responded the youngest Miss Templemore, briskly. "I shall be ready to go as soon after ten as you like."

"Very well," assented the Colonel, as he made his adieus.

"You're in luck, you pickle!" cried Charlie, as the door closed on his retreating figure. "He'll give you enough chocolates to stock a shop. He's awfully rich, you know."

"And so handsome," sighed Joan, sentimentally. "Such lovely soft eyes, and such beautiful wavy hair."

"Why it's turning grey!" exclaimed Nan, in surprise.

"It's sprinkled a little on the temples, that's all. I'm sure I wish I had a chance of a lover like him, so noble, and grand, and rich."

"Lover, indeed!" echoed saucy Nan, with a toss of her golden head. "Please remember that I don't like old men. They are not in my line. You are confounding me with sober Bab, and her liking for fossils. I prefer youth."

"Always supposing you can get it," retorted Bab, turning out the solitary gas-jet with a snap, and betaking herself off to bed.

CHAPTER III.

"Through the land
Singing love came.

To a garden wild,

Where among hushed dreaming flowers,

A pale, golden-headed girl,

Like a daisy or a pearl.

Stood and smiled.

The reddest rose in all the land

He held to her;

Fell the poppies from his hand,

Brushed the gold bloom of her hair,

Smote her innocent eyes and fair,

Till they closed were."

The next morning Nan was up betimes, and quite in a flutter at the delightful prospect before her of unlimited "choos," as she termed the most delicious of all sweetmeats. She donned her best jacket and hat soon after breakfast, and then perambulated the "den" backwards and forwards like a wild animal in her restlessness, despite Bab's injunctions

to sit still and not make herself look untidy, while she fairly flew to the door when she heard the bell ring, and had it open before Sarah had commenced the ascent of the kitchen stairs.

"So you have come!" she exclaimed, her blue eyes dancing with glee, as she held out both hands to Tresillion.

"Yes. Did you think I would not?"

"I thought you might forget," she replied.

"I never forget my promises," he rejoined, marvelling not a little at himself for feeling such keen pleasure on looking at the beautiful, winsome face, instinct with life and happiness.

"I am so glad you haven't forgotten this," she told him, candidly.

"You would have been disappointed?"

"Awfully," she assured him in her naive, half-boyish way. "You see," she explained, with that delightful frankness that became her so well, "we have so few pleasures, so little amusement that we snatch at anything in that way like greedy and voracious sharks."

"I wish all sharks were as pretty," he muttered under his breath.

"Eh?" she queried, not catching the purport of his mutterings.

"Is your father coming with us?" he asked to create a diversion, and sincerely hoping that for once in a way his old friend would decline his society, and let him escort his youngest daughter alone to Clutterby's.

"I don't think he has finished his breakfast yet," she replied, "Come and see," and she led the way to the dining-room, where, seated in an arm-chair before the fire, attired in a once magnificent dressing gown, was Major Templemore, sipping his coffee, and trifling with an anchovy toast with all the languid air of a man of fashion.

"Ah, Tresillion!" he exclaimed, pleasantly. "You are the early bird that picks up the worm. I am a bit of a sluggard now."

"You would not be if you had the same inducement as I have to be early on this occasion, replied the soldier, gallantly glancing at Nan.

"Ah, yes! I remember. You are going to take my little girl to the sweetmeat shop."

"Yes. Are you coming with us, or will you trust her to me alone?"

"Trust her to you alone, my dear fellow! You know I would trust you with anything!" with an airy wave of the hands.

And it was a fact. Templemore, shallow, selfish and interested himself, could well appreciate the noble generosity and upright honourableness of his friend's character. Moreover, during the silent watches of the night it had occurred to the astute and needy Major that Rhoderick Tresillion would be a very desirable son-in-law, and that Nan, though only a child, was still a very pretty one, and in another year, or even six months, might very well become a wife, if the opportunity offered. So he had determined to encourage his friend if he showed a predilection for any of his daughters, and give him every opportunity of prosecuting his suit.

"Thanks. Then shall we set off, Miss Nan?"

"I am quite ready," she declared, eagerly.

"Nan is a regular baby," said her father with an unwontedly indulgent smile.

"Over chocolates," put in that young lady.

"And a good many other things, if your brother is to be believed!" laughed the Colonel.

"Oh, Charlie's a quiz."

"Come back to luncheon, Tresillion," shouted Templemore, as they were going out, "if you have nothing better to do."

"Thanks, I shall be delighted," he responded, and then opening the door he passed out into the pale, golden, wintry sunshine, to take his first walk with Nan Templemore.

"Do you like Braithwaite?" he began, anxious to improve his acquaintance with her.

"Pretty well," she answered coolly, "only I should like a change from it sometimes."

"Don't you ever go away?" he asked, in some surprise.

"Oh, never. We can't afford it, you know."

"But—your father?" he began.

"Yes, father goes away. But that's a different thing," she said, with unconscious pathos. "He's obliged to go to Lord Lenny's or General Maturin's and other people, and then there's no money left for us. Only," she added, brightening visibly, "now Charlie is making money he says he will take us away for a week or two when he can afford it. One at a time, and that will be delightful!"

"Yes, very," agreed her companion, thoughtfully, for her words were a revelation to him.

He knew Templemore to be fast and extravagant, but he had no idea that he would gratify his own selfish pleasures at the expense of his children.

"It is monotonous always living in the same place, seeing the same people, the same streets, the same houses. Don't you think so?"

"I should think very," he agreed.

"You could not bear it, of course?" she queried, looking up at him with those lovely blue eyes that already were playing havoc with his heart, stirring his pulses as they had never yet been stirred by woman's eyes in all the forty odd years of his life, "having been about so much, and seen so many different countries."

"I don't know," he replied, reflectively. "I begin to think now that I should like to settle down quietly, and have a home."

"Then you ought to marry," she said, promptly.

"Perhaps I ought," he rejoined, smiling a little at her candour and innocence of *les convenances*. "Perhaps I should like to. Only—"

"Only what?" she questioned, looking up at him again.

"I am afraid no one would have an old fellow like me."

"Oh, nonsense. Heaps of girls would," she said, quickly, thinking of Barbara, and what an improvement on the snuffy, bald-headed old fogey of their girlish talk this pleasant genial soldier would be as a husband for her.

"Not for love?" he continued, eagerly, for like most men on the wrong side of forty, he was anxious now to think that he might be loved and married for himself, and not on account of what he possessed.

"Yes. Why not? Some girls don't care for boys."

"I wonder whether you are one of those girls?" he thought, as he followed her into Clutterby's.

There he let her work her own sweet will amongst the cakes and sweets, gave her everything she fancied, and supplemented it by two or three costly boxes of bonbons of his own choosing.

Then, after purchasing a couple of pretty satin caskets for her two sisters, he proposed returning, which they did, Nan carrying with her a box of "choos," one or two of which she surreptitiously put into her mouth every now and then like the child she was, to his secret amusement.

On their way back he stopped at a poulterers, and ordered some fish and a brace of birds to be sent up to the Red House.

He was an old enough friend of Templemore's to be able to do it. Moreover, he had always played the part of banker to his needy brother officer, and knew it would far from give him offence, and he remembered Barbara's pale, dismayed face last night when her father asked for dinner, and concluded that it would be a relief to her to have something for luncheon provided.

As they walked slowly down the High-street chatting gaily together, they met a tall, slim, handsome young fellow with dark eyes and

hair, and features regular and classic as a Greek god's.

"Hullo! Tresillion," he exclaimed, stopping short, and holding out his hand, "I had no idea you were at Braithwaite."

"No? I only came yesterday."

"That accounts for my not having seen you before?"

"Yes. Is your regiment here now?"

"Yes. At the Colahert barracks, Nice quarters, but horribly dull place."

"Is it? I am sorry to hear it."

"Why? You have left the army now, I hear, so there is no chance of your being quartered in a dull little hole to languish of ennui, and nothing to do."

"Take care what you are saying. Miss Templemore is a native."

"Will you introduce me?" asked the young man, rather eagerly, for his eyes had wandered more than once to Nan's fair face, "and I will make my apologies."

"Captain Ashton, Miss Nan Templemore."

"I hope you will forgive my disparaging remarks about the town," he said, smiling at her.

"Oh, yes, certainly," she replied, coolly, "I quite agree with you, it is a dull little hole."

"I am glad you are of the same opinion with me."

"Yes. Why?"

"Because then I know I have not offended you."

"No, you have not offended me. Why should you?"

"People don't always like to hear their native place disparaged?"

"People can't expect everybody else to think as they do," she retorted, quickly.

"No; quite right. Yet they often do, don't they, Tresillion?"

"Very often. There are so many unreasonable folk in the world."

"Just so; and now tell me," went on Ashton, as he turned and paced slowly along at Nan's side, "what has brought you to Braithwaite—business or pleasure?"

"Both," replied the Colonel. "You know, I suppose, that my uncle is dead?"

"When? Is he?" whistled the other.

"Yes. Six months ago. Died in Algiers."

"And left you everything, of course?"

"Of course; and one of my possessions is Caldecot Place, four miles from here."

"Lucky fellow. It is a splendid house."

"Yes. Not bad."

"Ah, that's the usual way in which you millionaires talk."

"I don't like the architecture of the house, though the grounds and park are well enough."

"You can alter that, perhaps."

"Yes, I may do so. You must come over and see me there."

"I shall be delighted to," replied Ashton.

"Are you going to settle down there at once?"

"Yes, in a day or two. Everything is ready for my reception, and the place manned by a whole regiment of old servants left by my uncle."

"I see. Well, you are a lucky fellow," repeated the Captain as they reached the Red House, and getting no invitation to come in, he reluctantly shook hands and made his adieu.

"Handsome, isn't he?" said Tresillion as they walked up towards the house between the flower beds, where here and there snowdrops reared their white heads, and the crocus and primrose bloomed brightly.

"Yes, very," agreed Nan.

"And fascinating. He is a tremendous favourite with everybody, quite spoiled by petting."

"Is he?" she said in surprised tones.

"Yes. Does it surprise you?"

"A little."

"Why?"

"I don't think he is sincere; and I am sure he is very conceited!"

"That is hardly to be wondered at considering the flattery he receives."

"Perhaps not; still I don't see why a man should fancy himself superior to every one else because he is good-looking."

"He is rich as well!"

"That would make no difference to me," replied the girl, innocently, raising her delicately-pencilled eyebrows in wonderment.

"Don't you care for money?" asked her companion, quickly, a very eager light in his grey eyes.

"In one way I do," she acknowledged, candidly. "I should like to have some to spend in pretty things; but I should never like a person because they were rich nor dislike them because they were poor."

"I am glad to hear you say that, Miss Nancy," he told her, earnestly. "You are not like any of the young ladies of the fashionable world."

"No; why should I be? I have never mixed with the fashionable world. I know nothing about it. I think people are very mean to judge others by the amount of money they have."

"So do I."

"And Colonel Tresillion?"

"Yes."

"My name is not Nancy."

"No; I thought it was because they called you Nan."

"My real name is Matilda, only they," nodding her ruddy head towards the house, "didn't like it, so they called me Nan."

"I see. A much more suitable cognomen for you."

And then they went into the dining-room, and partook of quite a dainty luncheon later on, owing to the Colonel's generosity, and then they sat in the drawing-room, and discussed "choos" and praised the beautiful caskets of sweetmeats he had sent them; and when Nan went to bed, that night, she lay thinking of Colonel Tresillion, and came to the conclusion that he was the nicest person she had ever met, and when she fell asleep, her maiden dreams were full of him, and she still seemed to hear his deep, rich voice murmuring in her ear.

CHAPTER IV.

"Two wedded from the portal step;

The bells made happy carollings,

The air was soft as fanning wings,

White petals on the pathway slept

Oh, pure-eyed bride!

Oh, tender pride!"

During the next few days Colonel Tresillion spent the greater portion of his time at the Red House, and his thoughtful care and many presents saved Barbara many an anxious moment, and made housekeeping comparatively easy work.

She was loud in her praises of him, and so were all the others, except perhaps Nan, who did not say much, though she brightened visibly whenever the Colonel's tall, erect figure was seen approaching the house, and actually took the pains to keep her curly locks in order, her collar straight, and put on a tidy gown.

Her brother and sisters were not slow in noting this, nor the fact that Tresillion was always at her side, showing a decided preference for her society to that of anyone else; but they maintained a wise and discreet silence, and neither jested nor joked her about her middle-aged admirer after their usual fashion.

In this they were doing violence to their feelings, for they would dearly have loved to chaff her, and tell her old fossils were not in her line, only they dared not. Their amiable parent had called a council of war the day his friend took Nan to Clutterby's, and told them he thought the gallant soldier was struck with her girlish charms, and warned them on pain of his extreme displeasure, not to chaff her, or open her eyes to the true state of affairs,

as the bird being young and shy might take wing and be off, while if left in blissful ignorance of the Colonel's true intentions might fall into the trap laid for her.

Half reluctantly they obeyed his commands. They knew it would be a grand thing for Nan to marry such a rich man, and yet with the perversity of youth, they grudged her to him, thinking she ought to have with someone more of her own age, young and eager, not middle-aged and staid.

Meanwhile, Nan was perfectly happy. She tasted many delights through her father's friend that had never come into her prosaic, monotonous life before; and the flowers he sent both to her and her sisters were simply lovely. She felt she could almost be fond of him for the sake of those lovely blooms, and she showed such childlike pleasure at his coming, that in the world-weary man's heart began to spring up a delicious hope, sweet to him as any boy's first attack of calf-love, that after a while she might grow to care for him well enough to become his wife.

He breathed no word of this, however, to any living soul, and after a fortnight he went to Caldecott Place, and for a week they saw nothing of him.

To Nan those seven days seemed longer than any she had known before. They lacked something she hardly knew what. But on the eighth when his well-known figure was seen steering towards the house between the garden beds, she simply flew out to meet him, crying,—

"Oh, I am so glad to see you again!"

"And I to see you," he smiled, looking down at the fair face, the memory of which had haunted him persistently during the past week.

"Are you, really?"

"Yes. Really."

"I thought you had forgotten me amongst all your grand friends," with a little delicious pout of the red lips, that made him long to take her in his arms and kiss her.

"My dear child, I have not been amongst any grand friends," he protested, earnestly.

"No," she said, half doubtfully.

"No. I have been settling up my household gods."

"And how do they look?" she queried, smiling up at him.

"I want you to come and tell me."

"That will be delightful."

"To-morrow, if your father will bring you?"

"We will go and ask him," and she led him a willing captive to the drawing room, where the Major reclined lazily on a couch before a brisk fire reading a novel.

"Ah! Tresillion, back again?" he said, with a feeling of pleasure only second to Nan's, for he knew presents of game, fruit and wine would be sent again now his friend had settled his house and was at leisure to think about the wants of others.

"Yes. I've finished my arrangements at the Place, and I want you to come and see them."

"Delighted to."

"To-morrow, if you will?"

"Yes."

"And bring Miss Nan and her two sisters."

"You are very kind, Rhoderick," he said, gratefully, thinking this was a step in the right direction.

"I will send the carriage at half-past twelve for you," and then having settled that matter to his satisfaction he followed Nan to the Den, where he was quite at home, and presently found himself going to Osterby's with Joan at his right and Nell on his left side.

And here they met Captain Ashton and one or two other officers of the Bombay Dusters, and the Captain renewed his acquaintance with Nan, and procured an introduction to Joan, finally walking back beside her, while Tresillion and her sister led the way.

The next morning at twelve-thirty punctually the three Misses Templemore, attired in their best bibs and tuckers, and attended by

the Majors, entered the handsome carriage sent by Tresillion, and were soon whirling away through the country lanes, where the budding trees and tender blossoms peeping out from the mosses and undergrowth showed spring was at hand.

It did not take the fine, high-stepping greys who drew it long to reach Caldecott Place, where they found their host awaiting them on the marble terrace that ran round three sides of the house, in company with three or four gentlemen, one of whom proved to be Captain Ashton, for he was not slow in greeting the pretty sisters, attaching himself to Joan's side since Tresillion stuck by Nan.

"My sister has come to do the honours for me," he said, smilingly, as he led the way into the hall where a great wood fire blazed cheerily under the tall carved mantelpiece.

It was square, panelled with richly carved oak, and the shining floor, left nearly bare save for a rug here and there, reflected back the ruddy glare of the fire from its polished oaken surface. In the corners were some quaint old cabinets loaded with rare china, curiously carved ivory figures, *recoo* jewellery, cameos, mosaics, and other curios, while on the walls hung miniatures of dead and bygone celebrities, intermingled with small silver and brass gorgets, such as were worn by the English troops in the last century.

Standing before the fire, full in its red glow stood a very beautiful brunette, who looked in her gorgeous dress of crimson satin, like some gay-plumaged bird from foreign climes. She came forward to meet her brother's guests with an easy grace of bearing, and a thoroughly self-possessed manner, that showed she was a thorough woman of the world.

"So glad to meet you," she said smiling, as she shook hands with the sisters, her sparkling dark eyes resting longest on Nan's bonny blonde head. "I hope we shall become good friends."

"I hope so, too," replied the girl with her usual frankness. "I don't like having enemies."

"You haven't many, I should think," smiled Lady Vavasour, amused by the childlike speech of the other.

"Not that I am aware of. Only sometimes we don't know which are enemies and which friends."

"Quite true, my dear."

"It is impossible that you could have any of the former," said a soft, silky voice at her side, and turning, she found Captain Ashton standing beside her, having watched his opportunity when Tresillion moved away for a moment.

"I am not certain of that," she replied.

"But I am," he said in low tones meant only for her ear. "One so lovely can only win good wishes and friendship."

"Oh, it doesn't matter about looks," she declared in her frank way; "pretty people are generally more disliked than ugly ones."

"I think they are generally beloved," he whispered, meaningly, and the girl coloured a little, and was glad that just then the diversion of going in to luncheon occurred, where she found herself safe between her host and a fat old man, who was paying no end of attention to Barbara, and who, she afterwards heard, was Mr. Vanbrugh, a Russia merchant, immensely wealthy, and on the look out for a young and pretty wife. During the meal the Colonel was very attentive to Nan, while Ashton, though he sat next to Joan, and kept his words for her, let his dark passionate eyes stray very often across the table to where Nan sat, in blissful unconsciousness of his ardent looks.

"How do you like the place, Miss Nan?" asked Colonel Tresillion later on, when he had shown her the blue drawing-room, with its satin and silver hangings, the library, with its wealth of valuable books, the conservatories with their crowds of lovely wax-like blooms, the commodious stables, the high-bred horses, the pictures, china, curiosities, weapons, and all his other treasures.

"It is the most beautiful place I have ever seen," she answered, simply, her eyes straying away over the lawn and garden to the park, where the graceful dappled deer herded, and the timid rabbits burrowed, and the giant oaks and elms were leaving fast.

"That is great praise," he said, pleased.

"Not too great," she answered, earnestly. "It seems to me that nothing is wanting here."

"And to me only one thing," he replied.

"And that?" she asked, innocently, looking up at him, and not understanding the drift of his speech.

"I will tell you some day."

"Why not now?"

"This is not—not the right time," he replied, evasively.

"You might tell me?" she pouted, with all a child's insistence.

"Wait," he smiled.

"I don't like waiting!"

"I promise that I'll tell you before the summer is over."

"I suppose I must be content with that; only I can't think what it is you want."

"No?"

"Everything is so perfect here."

"Not in my eyes."

"By the way," he went on a minute later, "would you care to come and stay here, and live a little? My sister is going to remain with me for the present, and we should be so glad if you would take pity on us."

"There is nothing I should like better!" replied Nan, eagerly, never giving a thought to her scanty wardrobe, which was anything save suitable for visiting at a grand house.

However, Barbara did when she heard of the invitation, and was absolutely dismayed at the prospect of Nan going to stay at Caldecott Place with two gowns, a collection of darned stockings, one white petticoat, one hat, patched boots, down-at-heel house-slippers, &c.

For once in a way the A. P. came to the rescue, actually producing some money for new clothes for his youngest; which, in later days, Bab came to think was given him for the purpose by Colonel Tresillion.

After a fortnight's hard work with the scissors and the sewing machine, she was ready to go to the Place, and set off one bright morning in the barouche with Lady Vavasour, looking so lovely and winsome, that involuntarily that lady's eyes went back again and again to the sweet face, with the wild-rose bloom, azure eyes, and coronal of golden hair, and she ceased to wonder at her brother's infatuation, and thought it only natural that he, grave, staid, and middle-aged, should love ardently one so young and fair.

Nan enjoyed the visit immensely. A world opened before her of which she had only the vaguest idea.

From the disagreeables of poverty she went with a bound to the ease and comfort riches give.

Every luxury money could procure was lavished on her and surrounded her; and, with the flexibility of youth, she adapted herself to her surroundings as though to the manner born.

The master of the Place was delighted at the pleasure shown by his young guest in everything, and seemed to grow younger by reason of her companionship.

They were always together; chaperoned, when absolutely necessary, by Lady Vavasour—generally alone, walking about the park, or strolling in the garden, or in the drawing-room, she singing, and he listening to the fresh young voice, whose sweet tones he had learnt to love so well.

Her sisters and father came occasionally to luncheon or dinner, and Captain Ashton and Mr. Vanbrugh were constant visitors, especially the former.

It was curious how frequently the young man wanted to consult his former chief about different trivial matters, things of no moment, apparently, but which yet brought him day

after day from Braithwaite to Caldecott Place, and kept him there hours, and sometimes rather to Tresillion's annoyance, for he did not play tennis himself, and he hardly cared to sit still and look on at Ashton and Nan knocking the balls about, and laughing gaily, while they chatted like magpies about all sorts of nonsensical things.

"Take care of that young Adonis!" said Lady Vavasour one afternoon, with a serious nod of the head, as Ashton rode off, turning every now and then while in sight to wave his hand to the girl who stood on the marble terrace looking after him.

"What do you mean?" asked her brother.

"Can't you see what's going on?" she asked, tranquilly.

"No-o!"

"Why he's making love to Nan."

"And she?" he asked, breathlessly, a sickening and sense of impending loss at his heart.

"As far as I can tell she does not care about him at present, save as a companion."

"Thank Heaven!" murmured the Colonel.

"But, he is young, handsome, fascinating. She may grow to care for him."

"Then what do you advise, Florence?" he asked, anxiously.

"That you propose at once, and marry her as soon as possible."

"I will take your advice about the proposing," he said, quickly. "As to the marrying, that must rest with my little darling," and stepping through the window, he went out on the terrace and joined Nan.

"Come to the orchard!" he said, presently; and when they were there he made her sit down on the flower-enamelled grass, and flinging himself at her feet, took both her hands in his.

"Nan," he began, gravely. "I have something to say to you!"

"To say to me?" she echoed, a little startled at his tone and manner.

"Yes!"

"What is it?" she queried, looking down at him inquiringly.

"Can't you guess?"

"No. I haven't an idea. Have I offended you?"

"Offended me, dear child? No; I don't think you could do that," and he looked up at her, all his honest love shining in his kindly grey eyes.

She had no hat on, the sunbeams played on her head, and glittered in the meshes of her bright hair, made the roses in her cheeks glow deeper. The apple-blossoms flattered down and rested here and there on her breast and shoulders, the soft wind stirred the little curls on her brow gently, while her lovely starry eyes sought his with inquiry in their blue depths.

"Nan!" he said, rising a little from his reclining posture, but still holding her hands tightly, "do you like me?"

"Oh, yes, you know I do!" she replied, frankly.

"And you like the Place?"

"Need you ask me?"

"Yes, I want to know!"

"I like it better than any other house I have ever been in."

"Would you be content to pass the greater part of your life here? To call it home?"

His passionate eyes were fixed eagerly on the sweet face, his voice trembled, his breath came pantingly from between his parted lips.

"Yes!" she said, in low tones, while the rose-tint in her cheeks deepened to damask.

"Then, Nan, will you be my wife?"

For a moment there was silence; then she lifted her face and said, "yes!"

"My darling!" he cried, rapturously, as he caught her to his breast, and covered the blushing face with kisses. "My love, my own! Mine till death parts us!"

"And do you really love me?" he asked, later on, as they paced under the blossom-loaded apple trees.

"I—I—like—you—very—very much; but Colonel Tresillion—"

"Call me Rhoderick!" he interrupted, passionately.

"Well, Rhoderick, I think I hardly know what—love—is," she faltered.

"Then I will teach you, sweetheart!" he cried, taking her once more in his strong arms, and kissing the sweet, unresisting lips.

A month later Nan became his wife, there being no obstacles in the way, such as an obdurate father, want of money, a home for the bride.

Everything was fair, plain sailing, and only one pair of eyes scowled on the bride and her groom as they "from the portal step," and those belonged to Arthur Ashton; and as neither Colonel or Mrs. Tresillion saw the baneful glance it did not matter much, and affected their happiness not one wit.

CHAPTER V.

"In the skies the sapphire blue

Now hath won its richest hue;

In the woods the breath of song

Sheds a ray.

In the deep heart of the rose

Now the crimson love-hue glows;

Now the glow-worm's lamp by night

Sheds a ray.

Dreamy, starry, greenly bright,

Come away!"

COLONEL TRESILLION took his young bride first to Paris, showing her all the gay delights of that wonderful city. Then they went on to Switzerland, visited Germany and Italy, passing part of the winter at Rome, for Nan, never having been abroad before, was wild with delight at all the strange sights and scenes, and did not seem anxious to return to England; while he, though he had seen all the wonders of the city of the seven hills several times, was quite content to visit them again in company with his lovely young bride, and saw beauties in broken columns, old pictures, and rare cameos, such as he had never seen before.

Then to gratify a whim of hers he took her on to Constantinople. He had told her he thought she would be disappointed, as all the glamour of romance could not hide the undeniable dirt of the East.

But when the vessel dropped her anchor at the entrance of the Golden Horn, the city looked so beautiful in the light of the early morn that she was enchanted; she liked the row ashore in the *caïque*, enjoyed the squabble at the custom house, and the long climb over the slippery muddy stones, and dogs innumerable up to the Pera plateau, where they stopped at the Hotel D'Angleterre in the Grande Rue.

From a window in the hotel the girl watched the life of the place in full circulation. There were people of every nation, in every dress, talking in different languages; elderly Turkish ladies in Yashmack and trousers studied the feminine frippery in the shop windows, which displayed almost everything that is sold in London, Vienna, or Paris; soldiers in blue jackets tramped by; vendors of cheese, pastry, fruit, and a score of other things, displayed their wares, and shouted themselves hoarse in their endeavours to dispose of them; streams of equestrians, queer-looking Jews, all sorts and conditions of men swarmed along the ill-paved street, below the curious square windows of the old houses, that above the first story jutted out over the road, until they were so near their *vis-à-vis* that it was possible to toss anything from one window to another, and hold converse across the street.

Nan was determined to see all that was to be seen in the queen of cities, and Tresillion, good-naturedly, humoured her, and took her to see everything he possibly could.

What she was most struck with was the dogs of Stambul, those street scavengers who helped to keep clear the refuse-strewn streets

of Constantinople. Lying asleep in the scorching sun, utterly indifferent to all going on around them, kicks, cuffs, heavy weights, people treading on them, serenely indifferent until hunger wakes them, and they trot off to scour the streets, and find food wherewith to assuage their hunger.

Rhoderick Tresillion found a fortnight at the Hotel D'Angleterre, in the Pera Grande Rue, quite sufficient and at the end of that time coaxed his bride into returning to England.

They reached the Place one soft April evening, and the majestic old house looked all the more grand in contrast with the aqualor and magnificence which they had recently left.

Major Templemore, Bab, Joan, and Charlie were all there to receive them, and the Colonel felt a little pang at his heart as he saw his beloved wife kiss and hug her brother and sisters with an abandon which she never showed when embracing him. Not that he had anything to complain of during the nine months of their wedded life.

She had always shown herself frankly fond of him, was always cheerful and good-tempered, but he adored her so much he constantly tormented himself with the idea that she was not quite happy, that she would be better married to a young man only four or five years her senior.

The idea occurred to him with greater force than ever as he saw her hanging on to Charlie's arm, laughing gaily, and chattering like a veritable magpie.

"She never chatters like that to me," he thought, with a heavy sigh, not knowing that her reverence for him was so great, and her idea of his exalted cleverness so great, that she was afraid to bore him with her girlish talk, and always tried to be sedate and staid as she thought he would like her to be.

Poor foolish couple! At sixes and sevens like all the rest of the world, despite their love for each other.

"Now tell me all the news, girls," cried Nan, when she had them safe in her bedroom, and they were assisting her to take off her travelling dress.

"What sort of news?" asked Joan, with a sly glance at Bab.

"Why, about your matrimonial prospects, to be sure," returned the young matron, vivaciously. "You've been precious quiet over what you have been doing since I left. Haven't given me much information in your letters!"

"Perhaps there wasn't any to give," replied Joan, demurely, again glancing at Barbara, whose face was unusually red, and who looked singularly embarrassed.

"Oh, nonsense! Come, tell me; have either of you had any offers?"

"I haven't."

"You then, Bab?"

"I—well—I—"

"Well, yes; she has," put in Joan, roguishly.

"Who is it?" asked Mrs. Tresillion, imperiously.

"Mr. Vanbrugh," replied Miss Templemore, rather faintly.

"Never, Bab?"

"It's true."

"And—have you accepted him?"

"Yes."

"True to your colours!" laughed Nan.

"Yes; she means to be an old man's darling," put in Joan.

"Rhoderick told me he has heaps of money!"

"Yes; he is very rich."

"And when are you to be married?"

"Next autumn."

"Sorry I can't be bridesmaid, Bab."

"So am I."

"You'll have to do with me!" grinned Joan.

"And you?" said Mrs. Tresillion, fixing her suddenly with her brilliant eyes. "What news have you to tell?"

"Not much," she replied, evasively, blushing furiously.

"Stuff! Tell me who it is?"
"I'm not engaged," she began, hesitatingly.

"No? Well, you hope to be. To whom?"

"Captain Ashton,"
"Captain Ashton!" echoed Nan in surprise, wondering why she felt such surprise on hearing his name.

"Yes."
"He has paid her a great deal of attention since last summer," Bab informed her.

"Indeed!" replied Mrs. Tresillion, as she fastened a diamond brooch in the laces of her tea-gown.

"But he hasn't proposed?"
"No, not yet," said Joan, with a deeper blush.

"We must bring him to the point, dear. You will have more opportunities of seeing him now I have come back; for, of course, he will come here to call, and I can throw you into each other's society. Come, now, and look at these gowns I have brought you from Paris. Pierrot has unpacked them;" and, followed by her sisters, she went into the dressing-room, and they were soon deep in the mystery of *ré-éda* silk, and paeon velvet, Mechlin lace, and rose point, &c.

Mrs. Tresillion was not wrong when she said Arthur Ashton would call at the Place.

Two days later, as she was lounging in the drawing room alone, playing with the silky ears of her little King Charles spaniel, the butler announced Captain Ashton.

As she rose to receive him, he gave a perceptible start of astonishment.

Mrs. Tresillion was a very different person from Nan Templemore.

She was rich now—had the power to gratify every whim and fancy. The old, shabby gowns and patched boots were a thing of the past. Delicate muslins, rich velvets, costly laces, soft silks—these were what she decked her lovely person with now, and, it must be owned, to great advantage. Moreover, during the last nine months, she had learnt the power of her beauty—before, only guessed it.

She had been worshipped by her husband, fêted and petted by an admiring crowd of friends and acquaintances in Paris and Rome—been made a little queen of; and some of the old girlish frankness had gone, or at least was concealed, under a self-possessed society manner.

It was with perfect ease and *aplomb* she held out one slim ringed hand to her guest.

"You are back at last," he said as he seated himself on the couch at her side, despite the growls of the little King Charles.

"At last!" she echoed with a smile.

"Why, we were only away nine months."
"Nine months! That is an age! Braithwaite seemed quite dull without you and the Colonel."

"Indeed. We ought to feel flattered."

"And don't, I suppose?" he queried, with an angry gleam in his dark, passionate eyes.

"Well, really, I hardly know," she responded, with a little tantalizing gesture of the white hands. "I don't see why our absence should have made the place dull. Colonel Tresillion was never there until last spring, and as for me, I never mixed with the Braithwaite folk."

"You thought them beneath you?" he suggested.

"I did not say so."

"You insinuated it."

"Not at all," she replied, quickly. "The reason why I did not go into society was simply this. My father is a poor man, and could not afford me and my sisters smart gowns, and as our old black day dresses were not suitable for dinners, or dances, or tennis parties, or anything of that kind, we refused all invitations, and remained under our own roof-tree."

"This is a pleasant exchange," he remarked, glancing round at the dainty room with its rich blue and silver hangings, a curious flicker of anticipated triumph in his dark eyes, for he looked upon her speech as a virtual acknowledgment of having married her

middle-aged husband for his money. Though nothing was really further from Nan's artless mind than to convey such an impression, she only spoke with her usual candour and frankness.

"Yes. Isn't it a delightful old house? I am never tired of looking at all the treasures and antiquities."

"A novelty at present," he rejoined, with a slight sneer on his handsome mouth. "How soon will you get tired of it, I wonder."

"Why, I hope, never," she replied, looking at him with wide open luminous eyes full of wonder. "Is it my home?"

"Yes, I know. But people often get tired of their homes."

"Not such a lovely one as this!" she expostulated.

"I have known women grow weary of an even more lovely place than this. So much, you know, depends on the society you have in your house."

"Yes, I suppose so," she agreed, with a faint sigh which his quick ear caught and interpreted aright.

"You are often alone?" he pursued, his passionate eager eyes on the fair face he was learning to love fatally well.

"Just at present I am," she allowed, frankly. "The Colonel's having some improvements made on his other estate in Marley. The cottages were tumble down hovels, quite insanitary; he is having commodious ones built."

"And he has the heart to leave you for tumble-down hovels," he said, jestingly, to cover the deeper meaning of his words.

"Why, yes, of course," laughed the girl, gaily. "He couldn't let the poor people die of typhoid and diptheria."

"Do you know, Mrs. Tresillion," said her companion, still in a light, mirthful way, "that if I stood in the Colonel's shoes—"

"You would do just as he does," she interrupted.

"I should never be able to tear myself away from your side."

"What a very inconvenient husband you would be."

"You wouldn't think that if—if you loved me."

"Oh, yes, I should," she told him with strong conviction. "I should grow very tired of a husband who followed me about all day like my shadow."

"Then you are different from most women."

"Possibly," she responded coolly. "I never could understand women liking to have a man tied to their apron-strings all day, trotting him about like a tame tabby cat."

"Ha! ha!" he laughed. "What a simile!"

"A very true one."

"We differ in opinion."

"Yes, I think we always shall. I believe, Captain Ashton there is something in our temperaments antagonistic to each other."

"I hope not," he said, earnestly, indeed so earnestly that she looked at him in surprise.

"Why?" she asked, after a pause.

"Because I have been hoping that we might become good friends and true."

"Well, I trust we shall," she responded, at once thinking of Joan and her evident tenderness for this handsome, dashing young soldier, and her promise to try and bring her sister's love affairs to a satisfactory conclusion.

"It will not be my fault if we don't," he assured her, with emphasis, which made her believe, poor innocent child, that he would ask her assistance in his courtship and propitiation of the A. P. after awhile.

"My sisters tell me they have seen a good deal of you since we went away," she said, thinking to give him a hint that she understood how matters lay.

"Yes, Major Templemore kindly gave me the *entree* of the Red House, and I availed myself eagerly of his permission to call."

"He is very much in love," thought Nan, delightedly. In which conjecture she was right, only she had hit on the wrong person as the object of his affections.

"Miss Templemore and Miss Joan always had some news to tell me about you—and the Colonel," he added as an afterthought.

"Yes."

"I used to listen with great pleasure to bits of your letters that they read and out."

"Where did they read them? In the den?" she cried, quickly, her thoughts reverting to the happy bygone days of her childhood, when they had discussed their scramble meals and the news of the day in the shabby old room, collected round the fire-place anyhow, and poising plates on their knees, and cups and saucers on stools on the ground or anywhere they could put them.

"In the den!" he repeated as though mystified.

"Yes, our old schoolroom," she explained.

"No. Your sisters used always to see me in the dining-room or the drawing-room, a very pretty and tasty apartment, by the way."

"Of course," she said, suddenly remembering that she had taken a peep into a room that was transformed from antique ugliness, to modern prettiness, by reason of the many presents she had sent her sisters from Paris, Rome, Geneva, Nuremberg, Venice, and a heap of other places she had visited during her sojourn abroad.

Her husband gave her a very liberal allowance besides a great many presents, and she, knowing how straightened the girls were, spent nearly the whole of it on things for them and their rooms, so that their attire and their house was very different from what it had been.

"You mean your sisters have taste?"

"I suppose they have."

"It runs in the family, evidently," looking at her dress. "That is a lovely gown you have on, Mrs. Tresillion."

"I am glad you like it. Worth designed it for me."

"Yes. It shows the master-hand. Are you coming to our dance on the third?" he asked, and then followed a conversation on all the amusements likely to take place in or about Braithwaite during the next two months.

At last he rose to go, reluctantly, yet feeling he had strained to the limit the length of time allowed for a ceremonious visit.

"Will you come and have luncheon here to-morrow?" she asked him, determined at once to give Joan her opportunity of bringing him to the point. "Some of my people are coming."

"I shall be delighted," he replied, readily, only too pleased to think he should see her again so soon.

After that day Captain Arthur Ashton's visit to the Place became very frequent, of almost daily occurrence.

Certainly he was always there when Joan was there; but it was equally certain that he was often there when Joan was at the Red House, while he appeared at every entertainment where Mrs. Tresillion appeared, and cavaliered her devotedly.

Joan came in for a share of the cavaliering when she accompanied her sister, and folks thought the handsome Captain was making the running with the second Miss Templemore, and that his friend's wife was simply chaperoning the lovers, and so the busy tongue of scandal was still, and did not wag as is usual on these occasions.

The young man was living in a sort of trance, as the days and weeks wore away, and grew more madly in love with Nan as each hour passed in her society, and thought she returned his wild passion.

Her innocence and lack of knowledge of wickedness and the ways of the world helped him in this self-deception, and, above all, her desire to secure her sister's happiness.

When he spoke of love to her in veiled terms she thought he was alluding to Joan. When he paid her a compliment, she concluded at once that it was Joan's fair prettiness he

was praising, while he quite misunderstood her pleasure at seeing him and her frequent invitations for him to come to the Place to quiet luncheons, to little dinners, where frequently Joan, Charlie, his hostess, and himself would compose the dinner party, the offer of a seat in her pony phaeton, when she knew her sister would be with her, and a hundred other little things which she did in the goodness of her young heart, seeking to bring the two, whom she supposed to be lovers, together.

He was not a good man. He never stopped to count the cost to himself or anyone of his strong, wild passion. He simply loved intensely, idolstrously.

The innocence of his boyhood, Heaven help him, had vanished long ago. He had become the slave of strong desires, of mad interests, that threatened to reprise and engulf him and others in their dark depths.

Meanwhile, as spring gave place to summer, and July came with its wealth of sweet flowers, its fast ripening grain and fruit, Rhoderick Tresillion grew strangely grave and silent.

He was suffering intensely, but he hid his suffering from all the world, more especially from the sweet girl he had made his wife, who was the delight, and yet torment of his life.

He thought her affection was slipping away from him—her love, he told himself with keen scorn, he never possessed.

He was a fool to think he ever would. What was there in him to chain a fairy, blithe, wandering creature like Nan?

Like unto like. What wonder that she sought so eagerly the society of Arthur Ashton? He was young like herself, gay, bright, joyful.

He could understand her, share her pleasures, be a fitting companion for her, while he, Tresillion, already felt the chill shadows of age falling on him.

Now, too late! He bitterly regretted having gathered the sweet young flower to wear in his breast. They had nothing in common, at least, so he told himself wearily.

He most unwisely treated her as a child, kept all his business affairs and worries to himself, and left her to her amusements and her gay friends.

Nan would have liked dearly to share all her husband's plans and pursuits, and be often with him. But she feared to bore him, and was very humble in her love, which is generally the case when a very youthful girl, who knows nothing of the tender passion, loves for the first time a man older and cleverer than herself, one who is a sort of hero, too, and has made the world ring with his bravery.

Colonel Tresillion did not doubt his wife's purity, was not angry with her, only felt a great pity for the child who had told him little more than a year ago under the blossoming apple-trees that she didn't know what love was, and determined to write to his sister to come and stay with them, and see if she could give him any advice, do anything that would ease the weary aching at his heart.

CHAPTER VI.

"For, see, a horse is at the door,
And little King Charlie is snarling.
Go back, my lord, across the moor,
For you are not her darling!"

"Good-nite, Rhoderick!"

"Good-bye, dear!"

"What time will you be back?"

"I don't know exactly."

"Don't be very late."

"No!"

"Come as soon as you can."

"Yes," responded the Colonel, bending over his stirrup leather, and missing the wistful look in his wife's lovely blue eyes.

"You'll be sure to be back to dinner?"

"Yes. Why are you so anxious to-day, Nan, about my return?" he queried. "Can't you amuse yourself during my absence?"

"Yes; but—" with a delicious little pout, "you go so often to Marley now nearly every day."

"My dear child, our poor folk must be well housed. There is so much to be seen to."

"You never ask me to go with you."

"Would you care to come?" he queried very eagerly, a joyous look sweeping over his troubled face.

"Very much, only—"

"Only what?"

"I thought you didn't want me with you there."

"I always want you, Nan," stretching down a hand, holding his whip and clasping her's in it as well.

"Then may I come to-morrow?"

"Yes, darling. I will have the phaeton out and drive you over."

"Thanks, and Rhoderick."

"Yes."

"You said I might learn riding."

"Yes, dear. So you may. Anything you like."

"But—" hesitating and looking up at him with a lovely shyness.

"Well," encouragingly.

"You said you would teach me."

"So I will, if you wish me to. The day after to-morrow."

"How jolly!"

Mrs. Tresillion did not often indulge in slang now that she was a matron, but the prospect of being taught riding by Rhody, was too much for her self-repression; and her husband smiled leniently as he heard the word.

She seemed more the Nan of old that morning, in her short, dainty, white dress, than she had for some time past, and his heart beat quickly, and his hopes rose. After all, he might win her to care for him if he tried very hard and amused her. He would do his best; and he cantered away down the avenue, waving his hand as he went with quite youthful glee.

Nan watched him till horse and rider disappeared in the distance, and then went slowly to the drawing-room, and sitting down before the piano let her fingers wander listlessly over the keys.

She was too much alone, and she often felt the time hang heavily on her hands. She couldn't always be pulling the spaniel's ears, or playing on the piano, and the stately satin-gowned housekeeper relieved her of all household troubles, and left her little to do. Tennis she was not very keen on since her marriage, as Rhody did not play it; croquet she abhorred; billiards she was a duffer at; and reading she only cared for occasionally, so she had considerable difficulty in filling the hours with occupation.

That morning she felt particularly *distracted* and languid, and she hailed with delight the advent of Joan about luncheon time.

"Captain Ashton isn't here yet," she said, as she kissed her sister.

"No; do you expect him to-day?"

"He said he was coming this afternoon about five."

"Then I shall not see him!"

"Why not?"

"I am going to an afternoon dance at the Rogers, and must leave here at three, in time to get home and dress."

"Joan, you never will!"

"Never will what, Nan?"

"Miss a chance of seeing Arthur Ashton?"

"I shall miss it to day, for I am determined to go to the Rogers."

"You are very foolish he might propose to-day."

"I don't think so," she said, a little sadly, "do you know, Nan, I don't believe he cares a bit about me?"

"Oh, Joan!"

"I don't really. A woman can always tell if a man really loves her."

"And—and—do—you—mind?" faltered Nan, overwhelmed at this crumbling to pieces of her castle in the air.

"No-o, not much, not as much as I should a month ago."

Now a month before, a certain good-looking navy lieutenant had appeared in Braithwaite and had paid Joan marked attention.

"I see. Geoffrey Colbourne?"

"Yes," nodded Joan, reddening visibly, for though extremely romantic, she was not a girl of very deep feeling, and had already transferred her affection from the army to the navy, and was interested in the sailor whose eyes were as blue as her own.

"I wonder how Arthur Ashton will take it when he learns you don't care for him?" said Nan, reflectively, when her sister was dressing to return to Braithwaite.

"Very lightly, I think," laughed Joan. "Love is a comedy now-a-days, not a tragedy."

"Not always," replied Nan, with a short, quick sigh.

"It will be a comedy to him, mark my words for it, dear," and then she got into the carriage Nan had ordered round for her to be driven back comfortably to Braithwaite, and made her adieu.

An hour after her departure Captain Ashton arrived, smiling, handsome, self-possessed as usual.

"Been playing?" he asked, after the first greetings were over.

"Yes."

"Any new songs?"

"No."

"Will you sing me some of the old ones then?"

"Not to-day," she replied, listlessly.

"What is the matter with you to-day?" he asked, tenderly.

"Nothing, that is the heat," she replied, evasively.

How could she tell him the woman he thinks he cares for has found a new lover?

"Will you sing for me?" she went on quickly to avoid being questioned.

"Of course: I will do anything you wish me," he said, at once seating himself at the piano, and running his hands lightly over the keys, began singing in a rich, deep voice, full of pathos and meaning.

"A place in thy memory, dearest,

Is all that I claim!

To pause, and look back when thou hearest

The sound of my name.

Another may woo thee nearer,

Another may win and wear,

I care not though he be dearer

If I am remembered there.

"Could I be thy true love, dearest,

Couldst thou smile upon me,

I could be the fondest and nearest

That ever loved thee!

But a cloud on my pathway is glooming,

That never must burst upon thine;

And Heaven, that made thine all blooming,

Never made thee to wither on mine!"

And on to the end of the beautiful song.

Heaven only knows what evil and daring thoughts were in the young man's mind as he sang, but he certainly addressed the words to his listener, who stood beside him, looking more beautiful than ever in a dress of shadowy palest blue, with white roses at her breast and belt, her sapphire eyes full of a wistful tenderness for the husband who would be with her again soon.

"Nan, did you like the words?" he whispered, softly.

"Yes; they are very pretty!" she replied, absently.

"Pretty! I think they are charming! I wonder, if I were to go away, whether you would give me a place in your memory?" he said, his dark, passionate eyes fixed on the fair, innocent face.

"Of course! I always remember my friends!"

"And am I nothing but a friend?" he asked, hotly.

"What else should you be?" she queried, wonderingly.

"Your lover!" he replied, bending towards her.

"Lover!" she repeated in amazement.

"Yes! Oh, Nan!" throwing himself at her feet, and clasping her hands in his, "you know I love you! Listen to me! Let me plead with you!"

And then followed words that were a disgrace to his manhood, and made her tingle and blush with shame as they poured from his lips hot as molten lava.

"Let me go! let me go!" she cried, struggling to free herself. "How dare you! How dare you!"

"Because I love you!" he replied, quickly, "and know that you love me! Come away! Leave that old man, who has no right to you! Come with me to Italy! In some sunny nook we will make our home! The world forgetting, by the world forgot!"

"Hush! hush!" she moaned, her head drooping on her breast.

"Why should I hush?" he asked, fiercely.

"Because—you—insult—me!" she faltered, faintly.

"Insult you!" he echoed, a fear rising in his breast that he had made a deadly mistake. "Insult you! Have you not led me to suppose you wished me to suggest flight to you for months past?"

"I?" she gasped in astonishment.

"Yes, you! Have you not encouraged me by every means in your power? Have you not asked me here time after time, procured me invitations for houses where you were going, driven me out in your phaeton, consulted me on several matters most women"—with biting sarcasm—"consult their husbands on? Why did you do this if you do not love me?"

"I—I did it for Joan's sake!" she faltered, miserably.

"Joan's sake!" he echoed, rising from the ground, and releasing her hands. "I don't understand!"

"I thought you—you cared for her, and meant to make her your wife."

"Good heavens, no! It was you! always you I loved!"

"Captain Ashton, please will you go?" she asked, her face very white, her lips trembling.

"Supposing I say no?" he retorted, "that I won't go without you? What then?"

For a moment the girl stood looking at him with wild eyes, dilated with fear; then the ring of a horse's hoofs were heard, and the sound of a cheery voice in the hall, and with a gasping cry she sprang across the room, tore open the door, just as Captain Ashton disappeared through the window, thinking disgression the better part of valour, and precipitated herself into her astonished husband's arms.

"My dear Nan, what is the matter?" he asked, soothingly, drawing her into the room and shutting the door. "Tell me?"

But it was long before her violent sobs ceased, and she was able to tell him the history of his friend's disgraceful treachery.

"And—and you don't care for him, Nan?" he whispered, scanning her fair face with his eager, yearning eyes.

"Care for him! I hate, loathe, detest him!" she cried, vehemently. "Rhoderick," she went on a minute later, slipping one white arm round his neck, and laying her soft, peach-like cheek against his sunbrowned one, "I told you once I did not know what love meant?"

"Yes, darling!"

"I do now! For I love you, my dear, dear husband!" and the soft lips sought his in a passionate kiss.

"Thank Heaven!" he murmured, gratefully, holding her close to his heart, and knowing that at last he had really won his wife.

[THE END.]

FACETIÆ.

WHEN Fogg was asked regarding the latest additions to the English language, he said he would ask his wife. She always had the last word.

MARRIED RICH.—Gus: "I hear George has married an heiress. He's in clover now, I suppose?" Dick: "No, he's working like a horse, trying to pay his board at a £8-a-week hotel. Her father pays hers, and she won't live anywhere else."

NO CAT NEEDED.—Bridget: "Sure, now, yez don't mane ter say yer livin' in a family phere there ain't no cat. Who his ye blame things on?" Ann: "The childer." "Oh, it's foolin' ye are." "They aren't her own childer; they're the master's."

GENTLEMEN OF LEISURE.—Kind lady: "What a nice little girl you are! Is your father in business in this city?" Little girl: "Business! My papa doesn't have to bother about business." "Ah! Gentleman of leisure, then?" "Yes'm; he's a detective."

WHERE THEY MET.—Angry Wife (after a quarrel): "Seems to me we've been married about a hundred years. I can't even remember when or where we first met." Husband (emphatically): "I can. It was at a dinner-party, and there were thirteen at table."

PREPARING FOR SUMMER.—Showman (to giant): "The posters are all fixed. As you are six feet nine inches in height I have advertised you as seven feet nine inches." "But I am over six feet nine inches; I am seven feet nine." "My gracious! I must rush around to the printing office, and get the figures changed to eight feet nine."

POWER OF ASSOCIATION.—Mrs. De-T. (looking up from the paper): "Well, I declare! Another woman, single-handed, has captured a burglar. I should think she would have been killed by the brute; but the papers say the moment she grasped a poker and made a dash for him, his knees trembled and his teeth shook, and he sank to the floor in affright." Mr. De-T.: "He is probably a married man."

THE CAT OUT.—Mr. Highliver (to his valet): "James, you are evidently an honest man, and I've never missed a penny since I had you, but I don't see how a man on your wages can have so much spending money." James: "You buy a mighty big lot o' champagne, sir, for you 'et an' you friends." "Indeed, I do—enormous quantities, best imported, fresh from France. Mr. Winsman doesn't give you a commission, does he?" "Oh, no, sir; but he pays me a big price for the empty bottles."

STRATEGY.—Mrs. Broker: "My dear, do you suppose it is possible for a man, almost any man, to sit alongside of a beautiful creature all day long, watching her pretty fingers toying with a type-writing machine, without falling in love with her?" Mr. Broker (suddenly becoming absorbed in a newspaper): "Oh, he might if she was pretty; but I never saw a pretty type-writer girl yet." "What! I saw a type writer girl at your office who could—" "That red-haired thing?" "Red-haired! She has the loveliest, sunniest tresses I ever gazed on." "Don't know who you can mean. My type-writer girl has ugly red hair, not beautiful black locks like yours, my dear, and her eyes, instead of being such a charming, soulful, black-brown like yours, are a watery gray." "They are divinely blue." "And her mouth doesn't look as if it was made for anything but pie." "I—I thought she had the mouth of a cherub." "And I do hate pug-noses." "Queer. I—had an idea it was Grecian." "Besides, I can't bear these thin, bony women." (Resumes reading.) Mrs. Broker (aside): "She has the face of a Madonna and the form of a sylph; but bless his fond, foolish heart, he hasn't eyes for any one but me."

"MADAM," reproachfully remarked the tramp, to whom the young housewife had given a couple of cold biscuits of her own make. "I have asked ye for bread and ye have given me a stone." And the next instant she gave him a brick.

THE old lady went to the theatre for the first time. The play was "Julius Cæsar." "Wa-al," she said, afterward, "I've hearn tell that the thea'ter were bad, but I think it's wuss than bad. It's nothin' but crime to kill all them fellers just to amuse the aujence, an' it oughter be put a stop to."

A MATTER OF HABIT.—A widower was at the altar for the fourth time. During the marriage service the sound of sobbing came from the rear of the family group, and an astonished guest inquired: "Who is the woman in tears? Some old flame?" "That's the cook," answered one of the children. "She always cries when papa is married."

A WISE HEAD.—Pretty Daughter: "Mother, when will I be of age?" Mother: "When you are twenty-one." "Can't I get married before that?" "Indeed you sha'n't! Not a day." Plain Daughter: "Must I wait until I am twenty-one, too?" Mother: "No—er—my dear. You have such an old head on your shoulders that I am sure you will choose wisely. Marry when you like."

A FAMILIAR SUBJECT.—Able Editor: "Yes, sir, Mr. Scribbler, I have a place for you on the staff if you wish it. When did you leave the paper over the way, and what was your work there?" Mr. Scribbler: "This morning I wrote the political editorials." "Well, take that desk and get up a good strong article pitching into the political editorial drivil which has been appearing in that paper lately."

AT THE WRONG HOUSE.—Tramp: "Please, mum, I'm starving. Won't you let me have a postage stamp to lick?" Experienced Housekeeper: "Why, certainly. My husband is just finishing a letter to Smith, offering to fight him anywhere, at any time, for £500 a side, Marquis of Queensbury rules. Wait until he is through, and perhaps he'll let you put the stamp on." Tramp (hastily departing): "Thankee kindly, mum, but maybe I can git a stamp at the next house without waiting."

CHAMPION RAPID WRITERS.—Mr. Hayseed: "Marier, I've made up my mind ter send our boy to the city to learn how to write." Mrs. Hayseed: "He writes a good hand." "Yes, Marier, but he's too slow for these times. The city's the place to learn things, Marier, no matter what. They write like greased lightning there. Why, Marier, while I was in the city, I saw a man write a two page love-letter in seventeen seconds, by the watch. He was a regular city feller, too—I could tell by his clothes. Why, Marier, when the girl that letter was writ to got it, it took her 'most five minutes to read it. I timed her, too." "Love-letter—girl reading it! Why, where and how on 'arth did you see a letter written, and then—" "Oh, it's all so, Marier. I saw it in a the a-ter."

A PARADOXICAL FRENCHMAN.—Monsieur D., having no faith in the funds, nor the banks, nor the railways, but unbounded confidence in Mr. G., an American merchant, placed in his hands ten thousand dollars. Some wags, aware of this transaction, got into loud conversation at an inn, in the presence of the Frenchman, and, among other things, "lamented the bankruptcy of Mr. G." The unhappy depositor rushed to the counting-house of his friend, and overwhelmed him with reproaches for his failure. "Wait for you fail when you owe me ten thousand dollars? Why not you tell me yesterday you fail to-day?" By this time, Mr. G. saw through the trick, and informed Monsieur D. he would give him a cheque for the amount. At this the Frenchman was more astonished than before, and exclaimed: "Ah! you got him? If you got him, I don't want him; but if you have not got him, I must have him!"

SOCIETY.

THE marriage of the Hon. Laura Fitzwilliam, eldest daughter of the late Viscount and Viscountess Milton, and granddaughter of Earl Fitzwilliam, which is to take place early in May, will, it is hoped by the natives, be the occasion of a good deal of gaiety in Yorkshire. The county has been singularly unfortunate this year, as the two families that usually take the lead in entertaining—Viscount Downe's and Sir George Wombwell's—are both in mourning. Miss Fitzwilliam is going to marry Captain George Douglas, the only son of Admiral Douglas of Nuxwells Park, near Royston. The celebrated Wentworth House will be thrown open to the county at least for one ball.

SWEET are the uses of adversity, sweet are the kisses of the gushing maidens, in the gloaming and anywhere else, but the sweetest thing of all is a jam pot. It is the thing now to run a jam factory. It is a noble pursuit, too, for Lord Sudely has been doing it for some years, and now another nobleman, Lord Coventry, is going in for it, to the great delight of the Brums and the plum growers from Pershore and Evesham. Besides, it is always cheering to see a lordly landowner waking up to the fact that he is bound to offer every encouragement to those who are toiling to improve his estate.

THE Earl is Master of the Buckhounds, and has twice been Captain of the Gentlemen-at-Arms, and Gold Stick. His pay amounts to £1,700 a year, besides possessing 14,419 acres which yield him £25,000 per annum. Lord Coventry's factory is now in course of erection on his estate at Pershore, and is expected to be in working order by the time the fruits, &c., are ripe in the great fruit-growing country about Worcester. What a change in public opinion since the reign of George III. who would have fainted at the bare idea of a Peer being engaged in trade!

COUNT HERBERT BRISTOL's suggestion that when the Emperor of Germany pays his long-deferred visit to England, he should be accompanied by his mother, so as to ensure for him a warm, popular welcome, is, to say the least of it, a wise one. Of course, as the head of a great and friendly Power, the Emperor William must be received with all ceremonious honour, but seeing that he does not possess a single quality that appeals to our nation, and that he has never taken the trouble to conceal his dislike for England and all things English, any attempt to excite enthusiasm on his behalf could only end in disaster.

PRINCE ALBERT VICTOR is about to go on a trip to Ireland, and the Royal yacht *Osborne* is ordered to be got ready without the least delay. What His Royal Highness will do in the Sister Isle is, as yet, a matter of uncertainty, but if his mission is of a serious character, with the view of healing ancient wounds, a more unsuitable minister could scarcely have been found. The young man has never proved himself a master in the matter of fact, and Ireland is the one place in the world where that quality is most needed.

LORD PORTMAN is dead and his son now reigns, but still the cry arises from the London tenants of this family, on account of their oppression through the ground rents which his Lordship is demanding from them. Lord Portman's rental is stated at £50,000 a year, but, by raising ground rents, it is supposed to far exceed that amount. If the Chancellor of the Exchequer were to tax ground rents, great relief might be given to tradesmen; but we have another suggestion to offer—viz., that he should increase the land tax on parks to ten shillings per acre. This would be beneficial in two ways, it would bring a large sum to the Exchequer; and cause a diminution of large tracts of land now wasted for the selfish gratification of the few.

STATISTICS.

THE cost of the Paris exposition will be £2,000,000.

DURING the last year the sum total of educational gifts in this country was nearly £1,000,000.

THERE are three million more women in Great Britain than men. Thirty-seven per cent. of all the women of marriageable age in England are unmarried. Fully one-half the women of the educated middle class—gentlewomen—of marriageable age, are without husbands.

THE Russian government proposes to build the longest railroad in the world. It will extend from St. Petersburg to the Pacific Ocean, a distance of 7,000 miles. About one-fourth of the line has already been constructed. It has been suggested that a road be built up the Alaska coast to meet it, and that Behring Straits be bridged by means of the many islands it contains. Stranger things have happened, and we may yet go from New York to Paris by rail.

GEMS.

DOST thou love life? Then do not squander time; for that is the stuff life is made of.

THE man who sits down and waits to be appreciated will find himself among uncalled for luggage after the limited express has gone by.

EXACTLY in proportion to the majesty of things in the scale of being is the completeness of their obedience to the laws that are set over them.

THERE is a rabble among the gentry as well as among the commonality, though their fortunes do somewhat gild their infirmities, and their purses compound for their follies.

IT is the man of unflinching integrity who has the most faith in the general honesty of the community—a faith not shaken by the occasional experience he meets of the reverse.

THE faults and weaknesses of others, instead of being woven into gossip, scandal, and useless criticism, should be used as danger signals to warn us away from the paths which have led to them.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

BROWN HASHED POTATOES.—Put a dozen potatoes, and chop fine. Season with salt and pepper, and place in small earthen dishes; cover with milk, and add small bits of butter to each; bake in a moderate oven one-half hour.

RICE CROQUETTES. Boil the rice until quite soft and tender; while warm measure; to every teaspoonful of boiled rice add an egg, well beaten, a tablespoonful of butter, pepper and salt to taste, and a half-teaspoon of any kind of cold fresh meat, ham or tongue, chopped fine. When cold with floured hands make into croquettes, cover with beaten egg, roll in biscuit dust, and fry in hot drippings until nicely browned.

SHREDDED FISH AND OYSTERS.—Cut the fish in pieces for serving, remove the skin and bone. Spread a thick coating of butter over the bottom of a stew-pan, lay in the fish, season each layer with salt and pepper, pour on boiling water to more than cover, add a tablespoonful of lemon-juice or vinegar, and simmer fifteen or twenty minutes, or till the fish is cooked but not broken. Add a tablespoonful of flour cooked in a tablespoonful of hot butter; mix it well with the boiling liquid without breaking the fish. Add a quart of oysters, or enough to equal the amount of fish. Simmer till the oysters are plump, about five minutes. Add more seasoning, and serve very hot.

MISCELLANEOUS.

WOMAN'S DEFERENCE TO WOMAN.—Women demand homage from men, are pleased with their attentions, and when it suits their inclination or convenience, will marry on occasion; but here the preference to masculine sentiment pretty much ceases. The opinion of a half-dozen women on a mooted point weighs more with a woman than the judgment of a whole community of men. Women dress for each other, suit their manners for each other, copy each other, and yet distrust each other, whilst they have confidence in and respect for the very men whose desires and views they substantially ignore. It is a singular phenomenon. It shows how much more fully rounded the mental life of a man is, since he takes in both sexes, whilst woman mainly confines herself to one, viz., her own. A woman has one great advantage in her dealings with a man. She understands a man; but no man ever understood a woman. The knowledge is all on one side. The amusing part of the social relations between the sexes is that men are oblivious of the fact that women are always adroitly playing a part, whilst men, good, stupid souls, are clumsily honest and in earnest. If they were permitted to listen to the comments of the women on them they would be disagreeably enlightened.

SOCIETY GIRLS.—What becomes of society girls who do not obey the natural laws, and marry in their second or third season? They simply gather their clans of men and girl friends still closer about them. They know them well enough now to call them by their Christian names. They spend a great deal of time at the houses of those of their "set" who have married. They have the best time imaginable. They are the jolliest women in the world, asking only to be amused and have "a good time." This delightful life lasts for some years; then comes the stage of old maidhood. The writer recently met a fashionable spinster of mature age at a wedding. She delighted in petting the grandchildren of the contemporaries of her girlhood "set" on the back, and asking them questions. She was garrulous, of course, and once very trying. She had got hold of a good-natured young man and told him that she and his mother came out at the same ball. "And who is that lovely girl right over there; I like to look at her?" "That is my sister." "And who is that woman over there, who is so badly dressed?" She was the young man's wife. He didn't say so, but left the old maid abruptly. Girls, you see what you are coming to. Make haste.

THE RUSSIANS AT VARNNA IN 1829.—Varna is situated on a gentle slope, a short distance from the shores of the Black Sea, and three or four miles to the south of a range of hills, between which and the town the unfortunate Russian army was encamped during the war of the year 1829. I say unfortunate, and all will agree with me, if they take into consideration a fact which I write on undoubted authority. When the Russians invaded Turkey in 1829 they lost 50,000 men by sickness alone, by want of necessities of life, and by neglect in the commissariat department; 50,000 Russians died on the plains of Turkey, not one man of whom was killed in battle, for their advance was not resisted by the Turks. In the next year (1830) the Russians lost 60,000 men between the Pruth and the city of Adrianople. Some of these, however, were legitimately slain in battle. When they arrived at Adrianople the troops were in so wretched a condition from sickness and want of food that not 7,000 men were able to bear arms. How many thousands of horses and mules perished in these two years is not known. If the Turks had known what was going on not a single Russian would have seen his native land again; even as it was, out of 150,000 men, not 6,000 ever recrossed the Russian frontier alive!

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

ETHEL.—The circumference of a cricket ball is 8½ inches; weight, 5½ ounces.

A. R. G. L.—Melt some white wax and apply it while hot with a brush. When cool try the pipe again.

ANXIOUS SON AND INEV.—Very good. Your friends are wrong.

E. J. P.—You can be compelled to pay all the arrears due on the order, and you ought not to grumble to have to do so.

H. I. T.—It might be worth a trial, but a little tincture of cantharides mixed with it would be an improvement for the purpose named.

ETHEL.—It is a matter of taste. Sometimes they introduce fanciful and fetching steps, while others content themselves with the recognized ones.

MOSS ROSE.—1. Certainly not. 2. There would be nothing wrong in doing so, provided he is not likely to misconstrue the gift. 3. Keep your distance. 4. You are not at all bound to do so. 5. You write a fair hand.

LENA.—1. Yes; it is proper for a married lady to accept the escort of her brother-in-law. 2. A girl becomes of age when she arrives at the age of twenty-one.

R. W. P.—A Stradivarius violinello was sold in Paris about three years ago for £1,000. It was disposed of at auction among other rare instruments, and was described as superb.

R. W. D.—The word "tacky" is used among artists to denote the half-dry condition of a picture. Thus, when it is "tacky," the artist considers it the proper time to work it up into a state of finish.

M. B. G.—Under the circumstances it will not be necessary to interrupt your practice more than one quarter. If not under instruction, it is customary, as a rule, to keep the instrument closed for a year.

S. M.—A baggala is a swift-sailing, two-masted vessel used by the Arabs in trading between the Malabar coast and the Red Sea, and sometimes, formerly, for piracy. Its average number of tons is about 200. The word is pronounced bag-ga-la, the accent on the first syllable.

SICK AND M.—Los Angeles, California, has always been recommended to persons of delicate health; and, if you were assured of profitable employment, we would advise you to go there. But give the subject due consideration before acting upon any suggestion that may be made to you.

L. G. S.—Dexter Tanner, who made himself famous by a prolonged fast, is still living. We are unable to state whether his proposed feat of being buried alive for four weeks, and then resuscitated, will prove successful. It will be necessary to await future developments. The date at which he proposes to perform this undertaking has not as yet been fixed upon.

R. S. R.—Go to a teacher in any of the public schools, and tell him of your difficulties and your ambitions, and you will doubtless be given the information you wish. Teachers are generally kindhearted and willing to assist an industrious, struggling boy; and they are, of course, peculiarly fitted by their experience to understand the difficulties which scholars most frequently meet in arithmetic and other studies.

R. H.—1. Choose some trade that you have a taste for, and think would prove a congenial one. Women have now more opportunities for self-advancement than they ever had before. 2. The selfishness complained of can only be overcome by mingling in general company, or what is called society. Working among strangers, as you suggest, would help you to lose the self-consciousness, which is such a drawback to timid or sensitive persons of your temperament.

W. B. M.—1. The wild pigeons of the United States, according to Audubon, travel a mile a minute. They are found in the Western and South-western States in great numbers. 2. To take young pigeons, or squabs, as they are called, the persons employed for the work go to their roosts armed with long poles, with which they upset their nests, and tumble them out. In this way they are caught in large numbers, put into cages, fattened, and killed as they are wanted.

E. A. G.—The costume worn by Carmen is the traditional theatrical costume of a Spanish gipsy girl. It consists of a décolleté sleeveless bodice of black and crimson, or black and yellow, with knots of bright-coloured ribbons, a skirt of black, and short overskirt of Spanish lace, and black hose. A mantilla and russet shoes of a fanciful pattern complete the costume. A singer taking the part of "Carmen" often carries a guitar or a pair of castanets.

L. D.—You acted rather hastily in the matter, and in all fairness should give the gentleman an explanation of your conduct. It is always best to ascertain the truthfulness of statements made regarding the character of friends and acquaintances, and thus avoid condemnation of actions that have taken place only in the mind of the person who first spread abroad the evil reports. We cannot agree in the statement that you loved him devotedly. If this were the case, he would never have been dismissed without being afforded an opportunity of refuting the slanderous stories regarding his character. Your love would have rebelled against such a cruel method of disposing of him, and thus insured him a hearing. In all probability you desired to get rid of him, and quickly grasped the opportunity afforded by the circulation of the reports in question.

G. L. P.—1. It would not have been in violation of etiquette for you to have asked the lady's permission, as she was probably deterred from giving the invitation you expected from a sense of delicacy. 2. Take the exercise referred to immediately after rising in the morning.

EDIE.—We do not remember the recipe to which you refer. It was doubtless accompanied with a caution as to taking it, inasmuch as we have little faith in any medical remedy which is not prescribed by a competent physician after a professional examination of the individual case.

E. A. C.—It will take a great deal of practice for you to acquire proficiency in telegraphy. If you could make the acquaintance of some young lady operator, and get a little instruction from her, it would greatly facilitate your acquisition of the necessary practical skill. There is no book that will enable you to master it thoroughly.

W. S. R.—1. "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty," and curl papers all day is the price of artificially curled hair. 2. If the parents of children born in Newfoundland are residents of that island, and subjects of the British crown, the children are British, politically speaking, but not necessarily English. They might be of Scotch, Irish, German, Turkish, or negro parentage.

ROSE W.—1. *Passé* is a French word meaning "past." It is used in connection with persons or things that are past their prime. It is also used in connection with articles that are out of fashion. 2. It by no means follows that because a girl of sixteen has not attracted callers that she will never have any admirers. A girl of sixteen who receives calls from admirers is commonly considered to be "rushing the season." She is precocious and the reverse of *passé*.

HE'S TEN YEARS OLD TO-DAY.

Look at him as he bounds along!

The red-cheeked, bright-eyed boy!

His well-knit limbs so lithe and strong,

His shout so full of joy!

School's not in yet—He's full of glee,

And ripe for any play;

His little heart is full, for he

Is ten years old to-day.

His roomy pockets plenteous

With top, and cord, and ball,

And rage, and stones, and bits of stick,

And other trifles small.

The hour is his, his mind is free,

So get not in his way—

Is he not rich? beside, you see,

He's ten years old to-day.

He is a prince among the boys

On this his natal morn;

Above them all you hear his voice,

Clear as a bugle-horn.

He laughs, he screams, he runs "like mad,"

No coil could wider play—

But wishes do not cold the lad,

He's ten years old to-day.

Oh, happy boy! so free from care,

How sad it is to know

That time will mark thy forehead fair

With trouble, toil, and woe!

But hush, you're untrammelled now,

So frolic while you may—

Though grief at last may shade thy brow

You're only ten to-day.

F. S. S.

C. H. G.—1. "Queen of my Soul" was written by Louise Stuart Costello, a native of Ireland. She was quite a prolific author, her earlier poems attracting the attention of Thomas Moore, to whom she dedicated in 1835 her "Specimens of the early poetry of France." Her "Rose Garden of Persia" contains translations from and biographical sketches of the most famous Persian poets. She was a sister of Dudley Costello, an author and journalist. His "Paint Heart Never Won Fair Lady" was dramatized in 1859. 2. The author of "A Wet Sheet and A Flowing Sea" is Allan Cunningham.

H. S. K.—To make potato jelly, pare and wash two good-sized potatoes, and grate them in a bowl. Pour on them half a pint of water, and strain the whole through a fine strainer or sieve. Let it remain a few minutes to settle; then drain off all the water, and pour on more. When the whole has settled, pour off the last water and then add one spoonful more, and stir it with the grated potatoes, as for starch. Have ready some boiling water, and pour the mixture into it gradually, stirring it all the time. When it becomes of the consistency of jelly, let it boil a few minutes longer. Add salt just to taste, and sweeten with loaf sugar. Flavour with lemon, or wine, and a little nutmeg.

T. H. C.—Soda-water, as sold in chemists' and other places, is erroneously named, as it contains no soda. Carbonic acid gas will mix with water at the common heat and pressure of the air; but if the heat be lessened and the pressure increased, a greater quantity of it can be forced into the water than at the common pressure. In making soda-water, the carbonic acid gas is obtained by pouring weak sulphuric acid over marble dust. This sets free the gas, which is then forced into the water in a very strong, air-tight vessel, and the water thus filled with the gas is then drawn off from the vessel in which it was mixed into smaller ones called cylinders. These are placed in the fountains and connected by a pipe with the spigot from which the water is drawn.

L. J. W.—1. Charlotte Corday, who was guillotined in Paris, July 17, 1793, was the daughter of a poor Norman nobleman of literary tastes, and the author of works of a republican tendency. Charlotte grew up to be also a republican in feeling, and her lover having been assassinated, she vowed revenge upon those whom she thought had instigated the crime. She hesitated for a time between Marat and Robespierre, but finally decided upon the death of the former, whom she found in his house taking a bath. She plunged a knife to the hilt in Marat's heart, and her victim sank back dead. Her trial took place four days afterwards, and she was sentenced and executed the same day. 2. Composition and penmanship good.

G. H. S.—1. A very simple method of repairing the silvering on the backs of looking-glasses is as follows: Clean the bare portion of the glass by rubbing it gently with fine cotton, taking care to remove any trace of dust and grease. If this cleaning be not done very carefully, defects will appear around the place repaired. With the point of a knife cut upon the back of another looking-glass around a portion of the silvering of the required form, but a little larger. Upon it place a small drop of mercury—a drop the size of a pin's head will be sufficient for a surface equal to the size of one's nail. The mercury spreads immediately, penetrates the amalgam where it was cut off with the knife, and the required piece may now be lifted and removed to the place to be repaired. This is the most difficult part of the operation. Then press lightly the removed portion with cotton. It hardens almost immediately, and the glass presents the same appearance as a new one. 2. Another method to repair a damaged looking-glass is to pour upon a sheet of tin foil about three drachms of quicksilver to the square foot of foil. Rub smartly with a piece of buckskin until the foil becomes brilliant. Lay the glass upon a flat table, face downward. Place the foil upon the damaged portion of the glass. Lay a sheet of paper over the foil, and place upon it a block of wood or a piece of marble with a perfectly flat surface. Put upon it sufficient weight to press it down. Let it remain in this position a few hours. The foil will adhere to the glass. 3. To remove stains from the hands, use the juice of ripe tomatoes. Sulphuric acid will also remove most stains, but it should be used very carefully—a few drops at a time—as it removes the colour from woolen and cats holes in cotton fabrics. When the stain disappears, wash the hands with fine soap.

A. C. A.—There are two kinds of oils, one bearing the name of fixed oils, and the other that of essential, or volatile oils. The former, which include olive oil, are sometimes a thin liquid, like olive oil, and sometimes a solid, like lard or beef tallow. They will all melt at a lower heat than is needed to boil water, but they cannot be distilled—that is, heat will not turn them into a vapour which, when cold, will turn back into oil again. This is why they are called fixed oils. On the other hand essential oils—so named because they contain the essential part or essence of the plants from which they are made—will all pass off in vapour at common temperatures or heats. For this reason they are denominated volatile oils. Fixed oils are obtained from both animals and vegetables. Lard, butter and tallow are the most important solid animal fats, while palm oil, coconut oil and butter of coconuts are the chief solid vegetable fats. The most useful fluid oils obtained from animals are sperm and other whale oil, and those procured from the cod, seal, shark, porpoise and dolphin. The fluid vegetable oils may be divided into two classes, drying and non-drying oils. Linseed, walnut, poppy and hemp are the chief instances of the first-named variety. Of the latter the principal are olive, almond, colza, peanut, cotton-seed and mustard-seed oils. Essential oils are lighter than water, will not mix with it, but with ether and alcohol, and they will burn. In all these respects they resemble the fixed oils, but are different from them in that they pass off into the air in the form of vapour at common heats, and they leave no greasy stain on paper after drying. They are procured from plants by distilling the flowers, wood or other part of the plant containing the oil with water. The vapour of the oil mixed with that of the water passes over into a vessel called the condenser, in which all the vapours are cooled and the oil settles and floats on the top of the water. Essential oils require to be kept in close vessels, to prevent their passing off in the form of vapour. They are principally employed in making perfumes, the flavouring of confectionery and liquors, and in medicine. The essential oil of turpentine distilled from ordinary turpentine is a very valuable article, because it dissolves the resins and unvulcanized India-rubber. Its principal use is in the manufacture of varnishes. Various gums, resins, spices and seed produce other essential oils that are turned to account in many ways.

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